

THEATRON PERCEIVED: THE SEEN, THE UNSEEN, AND THE SEERS IN
GREEK TRAGEDY

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What if the ornate purple fabric in *Agamemnon* was not on stage at all? What if the cataclysm at the end of *Prometheus Bound* was not staged? This dissertation argues that ancient Greek tragedy demanded an active, imaginative engagement from the audience in order to create theatrically real props and action that may not have been visible on the stage. Drawing on philosophical texts as well as key tragedies, including Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* and *Prometheus Bound*, and Euripides' *Heracles* and *Hippolytus*, this study further shows that seeing was itself understood as a powerful force, almost a physical touch between seer and seen object, and that this understanding is a crucial concept behind ancient anxieties about the powers and dangers of theatrical spectatorship.

Chapter 2 delineates the major functions of props in Greek tragedy, ultimately proposing that the unique functions of props do not always demand the presence of a visible prop on stage. Instead, some may have been theatrically real yet physically absent, too small to see, or very abstract. These objects, "rhetorized props," emerge through the language of the play, dramatic context, actors' gestures, and imaginations of the spectators, which collaborate to create the theatrical reality of the props.

Chapter 3 builds on the idea of rhetorized props to approach action that takes place on stage but that seems too unwieldy to have been represented fully with ancient stagecraft. Several key scenes yield a range of techniques that serve as indicators to

the spectators of what is happening and how they should imagine it, even if they cannot see it.

Chapter 4 explores ancient philosophical texts that attempt to explain the mechanics of perception. The Greeks seem to have understood vision as involving a close connection between seer and seen, and this serves as framework for understanding tragic scenes in which characters cover themselves or others to avoid being seen. If one can become polluted by simply seeing a polluted person, such as Heracles after he has murdered his family, what might that mean for those who watch theatrical performances?

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sarah Christine (Powers) Norman was born to Steve and Sue Powers in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She graduated from Baylor School in Chattanooga and attended Emory University as a Chris A. Yannopoulos Scholar, majoring in Classics and Theater Studies. After completing an honors thesis on ancient Greek and Roman comedy, she graduated with High Honors in 2005. She worked as the Literary Department Intern at the McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton, New Jersey for the year 2005-2006, assisting in production dramaturgy, literary management, and education programs. In fall 2006, she entered Cornell University and earned her Master of Arts degree in Theatre Arts in August 2009. She has presented her work at several conferences, including Theatre Symposium and the Society for the Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image, and her article “Helen’s Theatrical *Méchanê*: Props and Costumes in Euripides’ *Helen*” appeared in Volume 18 of *Theatre Symposium*.

For Kelly and Stephen,
with whom I first developed my imagination and theatrical aspirations.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: STAGE AND SPECTATOR

“It is the joint effort of author and reader which brings upon the scene that concrete and imaginary object which is the work of the mind. There is no art except for and by others.”

—Jean-Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature?*

Part One: The Creative Work of Spectators in the Theater

Recall, for a moment, a memory of reading a particularly engrossing novel.¹ The author’s words have created a story, characters, a physical and social environment for those characters, and a tone or style that inflects the world of that story. But what did *you* add to your own experience and understanding of that novel? Why might it have been so enthralling to you, perhaps despite your awareness that it was not so to a friend or a critic who had read the novel? Even from our own past experiences, without working through any complex theories, we know that we contribute to our experiences of literature, at least to some extent. Perhaps we speak of being “at the right time of life” to enjoy and find meaning in a particular work, or we notice that our own personal experiences inform our understanding of a piece, or we admit to looking for a book that would complement our current mood or create a mood we would like

¹ I am using the novel as a familiar example, but most of these considerations would hold true for other forms of literature as well, such as poetry and drama.

to substitute for our current one. We might even realize that particular external circumstances tend to lead us to a stronger experience with a novel: a bustling bookstore or noisy subway might stimulate the imaginations of some readers, who feel the busy world melt away as they slip into the book, while other readers might need silence and a comfortable chair at home in order to connect strongly with a novel.

If we can acknowledge that readers contribute to the creation of the artistic whole in the context of literary fiction, which can so often be written and read in solitude, how much more must this be true in the context of live theater, which engages the visual, aural, and sometimes even tactile and olfactory, senses? Consider, for example, just how different two performances of the same production might be as a result of differences in audience. A lively Friday-night audience of college students can create an entirely different performance of a university production than the Sunday-matinee audience of older community members and the actors' relatives. Even before the audience enters the space and joins the artistic event, the theater is already a thoroughly collaborative art form.² Relatively small-scale productions commonly involve a playwright (whether alive or deceased), a director, actors, stage manager(s), and a few designers, while large-scale efforts in the present day may include far more,

² I acknowledge that there are exceptions to this statement, such as a performance written, directed, and performed by a single person, but these are minor by comparison with all of the performances that involve multiple collaborators. In the ancient Greek context, the subject of this study, we might think of rhapsodes, the itinerant performers or epic poetry, as the equivalent of the "one-person show," and while rhapsode performances were theatrical in some sense, they were a distinctly different form from the performances of tragedy, comedy, satyr-play, and even dithyramb. Ultimately, of course, even one-person shows and rhapsode recitations become collaborative with the addition of an audience.

such as the fifty-seven credited collaborators, even aside from producers and stagehands, for the long-running Broadway production of *Phantom of the Opera*.³

A work of theatrical art and the resulting experiences of its artists and spectators emerge through a complex interaction of a wide variety of elements, including the live, continually changing dynamic between performers and spectators. Everyone in the space can contribute to the production of meaning and experience, whether through a striking gesture, a powerful line delivery, the crinkling of a candy wrapper, or a well- or ill-timed laugh. The theater is a place of imagination: a space for thinking and feeling, for responding, consciously or not, to the physical, vocal, and even tactile cues of performers and spectators alike. Every new piece of sensory data, every memory or thought, is available for incorporation into one's imagining, just as it may also serve to distract or divert the imaginative process. Performers and spectators may share many aspects of their experience and their understanding of the performance, while each may also have some uniquely personal aspects of her experience or interpretation. The theatrical experience combines the collective and the individualistic, interpellation and agency, emotional contagion and individual projection-identification, in an intricate network of factors and effects that, when successful, yields an active, imaginative experience for all involved.

In *Theatron Perceived: The Seen, the Unseen, and the Seers in Greek Tragedy*, I will be exploring imagination and perception in the context of the Greek tragic

³ The perpetually postponed *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark* is a particularly spectacular example. In an article on the production's woes in *The New York Times*, Patrick Healy and Kevin Flynn report its grand, and likely ill-advised scale, with such representative examples as the twenty-three-person costume team, seven stage managers, and about thirty-five stagehands to coordinate the many stunts.

theater. Our very term “theater” is derived directly from the Greeks’ term for their theater, “θέατρον” [*theatron*], meaning “seeing-place.”⁴ What does it mean for the Greek theater to be a place for seeing? What exactly could the spectators see, and how did they see it? How might the imagination contribute to what one sees or otherwise perceives in the theater?

Before turning to these questions in the specific Greek context, I will consider in a more critical and theoretical light some of the claims I have just made about the theatrical experience. Who contributes to the production of meaning and experience? What makes live theater categorically different from literature or filmed media? What is the cognitive basis for humans’ methods of making meaning, sending or “catching” emotions, and filling details into the imaginative construction? What kinds of external factors influence experience, and how do they do so? These theoretical considerations will provide the backdrop for a larger exploration of how playwrights, performers, spectators, and others might have come together as co-creators of the theatrical experience of Greek tragedies.

Reader-Response Theory: The Move to an Interactive Model in Literary Criticism

The role of the audience in the production of meaning in the theater has long been acknowledged by theater practitioners, if not always by its theorists. Even at a time when critics tended to judge plays primarily by their adherence to formal

⁴ Liddell and Scott’s lexicon provides the following definition for “θέατρον”: “place for seeing, esp. for dramatic representation, theatre...” The root word is “θεάομαι”: to “gaze at, behold, mostly with a sense of wonder.” For all discussions of word definitions, I use Liddell and Scott’s *A Greek-English Lexicon*, the standard and authoritative dictionary of Ancient Greek.

“unities” derived from Aristotle, generally by way of Lodovico Castelvetro’s interpretation of the *Poetics*, the immensely popular playwright Lope de Vega insisted that successful plays must take into account the comfort, attention span, preferences, and potential experience of the audience. His 1609 address to the Academy at Madrid on the art of writing plays in the present day focuses specifically on what will please the crowd, and his own suggestions for adapting the “rules” of the ancients is based on his assertions of what that crowd likes. He bases his recommendation for length, for example, on the audience’s comfort: “Let each act have but four sheets, for twelve are well suited to the time and patience of him who is listening” (203).

Bertolt Brecht, being both a theorist and a practitioner, was acutely aware of the audience’s role in the production of theatrical meaning and experience, though his approach runs counter to Lope’s interest in catering to the taste of the crowd and keeping the spectators comfortable, both physically and mentally. Brecht’s primary goals for his theater are in fact goals for the audience’s response, as he articulates in “Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction”: “The epic theatre’s spectator says: I’d never have thought it – That’s not the way – That’s extraordinary, hardly believable – It’s got to stop – The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary – That’s great art: nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh” (71). Such Brechtian techniques as “alienation,” historicization of events, and incorporation of commenting songs and placards all work towards achieving a particular mode of cognitive engagement among the spectators: an active, critical mode that leads to action in the real world after the performance ends. The role

of the spectators' participation is clearly a fundamental element of Brecht's theory and theater.

Aside from those who were also practitioners, whose success and even livelihood might depend upon the audience's experience and involvement in a performance, critics historically tended to focus more heavily on the dramatic or literary text than on a spectator's or reader's role. The theoretical movements of formalism and New Criticism took this inclination particularly far, deeming the text as the complete and independent artistic work, with such elements as the author's intention or personal background, the historical or social context of the text's composition or reception, and the role of the reader/spectator becoming strictly off-limits. Reader-response theory emerged as a sharp critical turn from this approach, in the 1960s and 1970s. These critics insisted that the reader, sometimes figured as an ideal or collective reader and sometimes as a unique individual, takes an active role in the production of meaning from a literary work.

In a survey of this criticism as a backdrop for her own exploration of production and reception in the theater, Susan Bennett summarizes several of the key arguments of reader-response theory. Norman N. Holland, one of the earliest proponents of this approach, was particularly interested in the element of fantasy, both the text's and the reader's, in the process of reading literature, and Bennett explains Holland's argument at a mid-point in his development of his theory: "Both texts and readers, Holland argues, hold a central core of fantasy, and it is the interaction of the two which produces meaning" (37). In his later work, Holland placed more of the responsibility for fantasy and interpretation upon the reader, and ultimately, in

Bennett's words, "Interpretation becomes solely a function of the reader through what Holland describes as an identity theme" (37).

Later reader-response theorists began to emphasize the conditions of reception, positing a reader who is not a theoretical construct in a vacuum, but rather an individual, or group of individuals, influenced by a community, a social context, and external circumstances. German critic Hans Robert Jauss particularly pressed the need for theorizing reception in its context, focusing on how context, in addition to the text itself, shapes the reader's expectations.⁵ This interest in the effect conditions of reception might have on the receiver and reception process serves as an important precedent for the subsequent, and current, critical interest in identity politics as an element in both production and reception, and this is where Susan Bennett intervenes in the critical discussion. Bennett consistently criticizes earlier reader-response theorists for their tendency either to omit or to minimize the importance of such considerations as race, class, gender, and sexuality in studying response and reception. The early reader-response critics laid much of the theoretical groundwork for a more inclusive, interactive model of reception, but the work of Bennett and others has now propelled the discussion to a more careful approach to the "reader" or "spectator," and their insistence on the receiver's personal background, expectations, and active choices remain a foundation for my approach in this study.⁶

⁵ See Bennett p. 49-51 or Jauss's *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Trans. Timothy Bahti. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1982) for a more detailed explanation of his arguments.

⁶ Although I will not explore the details of spectators' contexts and identities, I do accept the fundamental argument of the reader-response critics and their descendents: the reader/spectator is an active contributor to the meaning of a text/performance and

Bodily Presence and Communication

Despite the usefulness of reader-response theory as a starting point, live theatrical performance is fundamentally different from literature that exists firmly on the written page, or even from filmic and mediatized forms, though that line is becoming increasingly blurred.⁷ In the theater, the live bodies of performers share the same space with the live bodies of spectators. They exist together, in the unfolding of the performance event, and even in a fully scripted performance, the possibility always exists for spectators to influence that performance. A vocal response, such as laughter, can either refresh or derail the performers' energy, and a physical response, such as leaving the theater, applauding, or even throwing objects onto the stage can interrupt or otherwise alter the performance. While mediatized forms that are not prerecorded may capture the live theater's possibility for mistakes and improvisation, it cannot achieve that direct, two-way interaction between performer and spectator that lies at the heart of live performance.

to that reader/spectator's own experience in interpreting, feeling, and imagining while interacting with the literary text or theatrical performance.

⁷ I accept Phillip Auslander's point that mediatized performance often mingles with live performance, thus troubling ontological distinctions between the two. I do not, however, agree with Auslander's conclusion from this fact that such distinctions do not exist at all: "The progressive diminution of previous distinctions between the live and the mediatized, in which live events are becoming more and more like mediatized ones, raises for me the question of whether there really are clear-cut ontological distinctions between live forms and mediatized ones;" "Mediatized forms like film and video can be shown to have the same ontological characteristics as live performance, and live performance can be used in ways indistinguishable from the uses generally associated with mediatized forms" (Auslander 7, 184). The mingling of live and mediatized forms should not eliminate the possibility that there are essential, ontological differences between the two, such as the spectator's ability to influence the performance directly.

The presence of a live actor may have even further implications for communication between stage and auditorium. Not only does live theater allow for a more interactive form of communication, but it may also activate a different kind of perception than does a mediatized form. In his application of research in cognitive studies to theatrical spectatorship, Bruce McConachie dwells briefly on the argument between those who would dispense with ontological differences between live and mediatized forms, such as Phillip Auslander, and those who insist on some kind of fundamental difference between the two, such as Noël Carroll. McConachie takes Carroll's side in this debate, based on a difference in human perception, depending on the object of perception. In *Ways of Seeing*, Pierre Jacob and Mark Jeannerod develop a theory of "visual intentionalism," as McConachie explains:

Jacob and Jeannerod synthesize much of the recent psychological and neuroscientific work on vision to put forward a dual model of human visual processing, based on anatomical and neurological differences. On one hand, humans viewing the inanimate world generate 'visual perceptions'; on the other hand, humans intending to act upon the world or watching others act in intentional ways use a different mental system to generate 'visuomotor representations.' (56)

While we certainly respond to characters in a mediatized form with emotion, those filmed characters do not have the capability to act in intentional ways in the real world. They cannot directly act upon us, for example. Thus, as McConachie asserts, drawing upon Jacob and Jeannerod, as well as Carroll: "Mechanical repetition is not the same as intentional communication, and the audience will know the interactive

difference between them. Carroll's categorical difference carries over into visual cognition; we process liveness differently from landscapes" (58).

The presence of live performers in the theater with live spectators thus activates what Jacob and Jeannerod term "visuomotor representations," with spectators perceiving the performers, and vice versa, as live and intentional actors in the shared physical space. This co-presence, interactive communication, and perception through "visuomotor representations" serve as the basis for the cooperative imaginative participation that enlivens a performance. If spectators perceive the performers with special attention to the intentionality of their movement, how might the spectators' conclusions about that intentionality serve as a basis for their imagining? How might spectators relate affectively to those performers and the fictional characters they (re)present?

Imaginative Participation: Interpretation, Affect, Emotional Contagion, and Cooperative Creation

The process of interpreting a theatrical performance might involve a variety of cognitive actions on the part of the spectator, and many of these are also active in the spectators' everyday lives outside the theater. As Joseph Anderson has explained in his ecological approach to film theory, humans have a strong, perhaps innate, tendency to create stories, to narratize their own experiences and information they encounter. Information is more salient and easier for us to remember when in the form of a narrative with cause and effect, especially when then put into relationship with ourselves. Anderson explains: "Objects and events are, of course, whatever they are in

a physical sense, but meanings are generated in the *relationships* of individuals to such objects and events—the relationships that J. J. Gibson has called affordances” (147). Narratives, fictional or not, place objects and events in a relationship with characters, fictional or not, thus allowing reader/spectators to understand their meaning in relation to those characters as a part of the meaning-making process.

Characters themselves may require some cognitive effort on the part of the spectator. In the theater, spectators must blend the live actor with the fictional character, creating a complex blend of the two that may further vary over the course of the performance. Again, this process has its basis in real-world cognitive tasks, as humans must often blend two concepts in order to create a new one. Bruce McConachie discusses research by cognitive scientists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner into this process of conceptual blending in the context of interpreting identities, explaining: “As Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (F and T) have noted in *The Way We Think*, audiences generally ‘blend’ the actor and character together into one image, one concept of identity, to enable their affective immersion in the performance. Like other conceptual universals, identity can work singly or can participate in the more complex cognitive operation of blending” (42). Furthermore, according to these researchers, “blending is learned in infancy and soon occurs automatically to generate complex cognitive concepts, mostly below the level of consciousness,” which means that theatrical spectatorship need not involve a conscious “suspension of disbelief” or similar effort (42).

Theatrical spectators are constantly active in their blending, but much of this process may occur without conscious awareness of it, even though the blending itself

is constantly in flux, as McConachie further asserts: “As viewers, we oscillate millisecond by millisecond among blends and singular identities” (44). If an actor forgets a line and “falls out of character” for a moment, spectators might perceive the actor more strongly than the character in the blended identity, while in another moment, a spectator might feel more absorbed in the fictional diegesis and thus perceive the character virtually to the exclusion of the actor. Individual spectators will blend in different ways and to different degrees, depending on their own conditions and choices. For example, a spectator who has a personal relationship with an actor might remain more aware of that actor’s identity, in comparison to the character’s, throughout the performance.

Humans’ tendency to understand events in relation to themselves or to other people, along with their ability to blend concepts such as actor and character, forms a basis for imaginative participation in the theater. The basic level of interpretation of a performance may also involve more conscious or more culturally inflected decoding, as the semiotic approach has helpfully examined. Spectators may need to decode verbal language or culturally specific gestures, and knowledge of theatrical conventions may further contribute to the process of making meaning. A particularly crucial element for imaginative participation, though, is affective participation in the performance.

In his 1956 work, *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man*, French thinker Edgar Morin explored the nature of film in relation to a fundamental human phenomenon that he termed “projection-identification” or “affective participation.” Whether on a conscious or sub-conscious level, as Morin explains, humans have a subjective,

affective response to almost everything they encounter. We project our own feelings, memories, and subjectivity onto the world, while at the same time taking qualities of the world into ourselves through the process of identification. This complex process may occur below the level of consciousness, and it may be a messy jumble of projections, identifications, and perceptions, as “[t]he zone of affective participation is that of mixed, uncertain, ambivalent projection-identifications” (Morin 89). Morin’s explanation of projection-identification complements Joseph Anderson’s assertion of humans’ need to understand events in relation to themselves or another person: both phenomena reflect the fact that, as an evolutionary or ecological approach shows, we are a very human-centered species, and our cognitive abilities have developed to serve this perspective on the world.

The phenomenon of projection-identification is the fundamental element of our affective participation in the world around us, and thus it becomes the foundation for our affective participation in the theater. As theatrical spectators, we might project our own memories and preferences upon the characters and actions we see on the stage, and we might take elements of those characters and actions into ourselves, feeling that we share certain aspects of ourselves with those enacted characters and events. This affective participation is partially responsible for the diversity of interpretations and experiences that spectators might have: if each of us draws from our own memories, moral positions, cultural backgrounds, and similar perspectives, we should certainly create different imaginative constructs of the characters and action. For example, a spectator might interpret a character as domineering because she, perhaps unconsciously, associates the actor’s mannerisms with those of her overbearing boss

and thus imaginatively fills a sense of “domineering” into her understanding of the character. She might then have a more negative reaction to that character than another spectator does, even if she does not realize the connection she has made. Projection-identification is thus a major contributor to the unique individuality of experience in the theater, and it emphasizes the spectator’s active role, likely both conscious and unconscious, in creating the meaning and experience of the performance.

Recent research in neuroscience has uncovered a further element in our process of perceiving and making meaning from the actions of other people. While the findings are not yet conclusive or clearly defined, the mirror neuron system seems to be an automatic, unconscious level of our interpretation of others’ intentions and emotional states. Bruce McConachie provides a useful synthesis of the research on mirror neurons and the automatic level of empathy, explaining that people can “‘read the minds’ of actor/characters, to intuit their beliefs, intentions, and emotions by watching their motor actions” (65). This process, McConachie explains, often operates on an unconscious level, and in his summary of the findings of a study by Paula M. Niedenthal et al., he further argues that the observer’s response involves an embodied mirroring of the target’s own emotional behavior: “Citing many studies that rely primarily on monitoring electromyographic responses in perceivers of angry faces, comedy routines, and other stimulating experiences, the authors conclude that ‘individuals partly or fully embody the emotional expressions of other people’” (67).⁸

⁸ McConachie is citing Paula M. Niedenthal et al. “Embodiment in the Acquisition and Use of Emotion Knowledge.” *Emotion and Consciousness*. Ed. Lisa Feldman Barrett, Paula M. Niedenthal, and Piotr Winkielman. New York: Guilford Press, 2005. 21-50.

Thus the interpretation of another's emotional state may involve some degree of automatic "mirroring" of that state in the perceiver.

Research into the mirror neuron system, specifically, further suggests that this process of base-level empathy involves an unconscious simulation of the target's intentional action. As McConachie explains,

Our mirror systems generate what Jacob and Jeannerod have called visuomotor representations of others' intentional actions. As they state: '[T]he perception of biological motion automatically triggers, in the observer, the formation of a motor plan to perform the observed movement. Thus, motor imagery lies at the interface between the planning of movements and the observation of others' movements.

Arguably, in humans, the capacity for motor imagery may have unique adaptive value, since the observation of others' bodily movements is a crucial source for the learning of skilled gestures by imitation.' (72)

The ability to mirror another's motor actions clearly brings evolutionary advantages, especially for a species as social as humans, and while the precise mechanisms and degrees to which we do this remain contested, these processes of visuomotor representation and mirroring do provide a good explanation for how we interpret the behavior and states of mind of others, including actor/characters in the theater.

In addition to research into mirror neurons and similar systems, studies have also emerged to provide more evidence for a similar but more generally acknowledged phenomenon: emotional contagion. The idea that "emotions are contagious" may be a truism, but it nonetheless stems from a truth. An individual can easily feel caught up in

the emotion of a larger group, eventually joining it to contribute to mass hysteria or a political protest, for example. If we accept the research on mirror systems, we can see that the unconscious mirroring of another's intentional actions and emotional states might create a similar emotion in the perceiver and thus result in emotional contagion. Even without involving mirror neurons, however, researchers have conducted studies that support the existence, though not necessarily the mechanism, of emotional contagion.

In *Emotional Contagion*, Elaine Hatfield et al. distinguish between several types of emotions and focus on what they term “primitive emotional contagion”: “This is defined as ‘the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and, consequently, to converge emotionally. (Hatfield et al., 1992, pp. 153-154)”⁹ (5). This, then, is the level of emotional contagion that occurs below our threshold of consciousness, though we may become consciously aware of our emotional change and its source. Hatfield et al. provide evidence for a process of contagion, including automatic mimicry of “facial expressions, vocal expressions, postures, and movements of those around them,” followed by the actual experience of emotions that suit those expressions (5).

In a 2001 paper, Barbara Wild et al. experimentally confirm the earlier hypotheses of Hatfield et al., also adding new data about particular aspects of primary

⁹ Hatfield et al. begin this book-length study by citing their earlier (1992) article on the subject, “Emotional Contagion,” in *Review of Personality and Social Psychology: Vol. 14. Emotion and Social Behavior* (Ed. M. S. Clark. Newbury Park, CA: Sage. 151-177.).

emotional contagion. Wild's team presented volunteer subjects with pictures of faces adapted from images in Ekman and Friesen's *Pictures of Facial Affect*.¹⁰ They used basic "happy" and "sad" faces, with varying degrees of expressiveness, and subjects were asked to look at each picture, then respond immediately to a short questionnaire, asking how pleasant or unpleasant the picture was, which emotion(s) it evoked (choices were given), and how strongly those emotion(s) were present (113-114). They found that subjects generally reported feeling the basic emotion that the face in the picture expressed, except in the case of the most extreme "happy" face, which often generated the response of "surprise." More interestingly, they also found that subjects' responses were consistent independent of the time the picture was presented to the subject, even down to a duration of 500ms (116). This result serves as further evidence for the automatic nature of the interpretation and contagion of emotions. More work certainly remains to be done, but as Wild et al. conclude, "The fast and automatic induction of emotional experiences by the perception of emotionally expressive faces should be a powerful instrument to simultaneously decode emotional states in other people and to form the basis for potential reactions" (121).

The implications of visuomotor representation, mirroring, and emotional contagion are very significant for theatrical spectatorship. These processes allow spectators to interpret the emotions and intentions that actor/characters present on the stage, and emotional contagion in particular can contribute to the spectators' collective experience: spectators can influence each other with their emotions. In the ancient

¹⁰ Ekman, P and W. Friesen. *Pictures of Facial Affect*. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1976.

Greek context, interpretation of actor/characters' emotions and intentions is more complex than it is in the context of more intimate theaters. The use of masks, together with the large distance between most spectators and the stage, prevents spectators from seeing and responding to facial expressions. Larger, physical gestures are still available, though, and these must have formed an important part of the interpretation of the action. Furthermore, in a crowded outdoor auditorium in full daylight, spectators would be more aware of each other's expressions and emotions than we tend to be in the typical modern theater, with our dimmed house lights. Perhaps the specific elements of the context of the Greek theater served as conditions for a particularly high degree of emotional contagion among spectators, allowing for a strong communal experience and sense of unity. Perhaps, to a different effect, this context also helps to explain why ancient theatrical performances, athletic events, and spectacles could so often result in riots.

These processes of cognitive interpretation and basic-level emotional response to the expressions and actions of others come together as some of the underlying mechanisms of theatrical spectatorship. Cognitive blending, projection-identification, mirroring, emotional contagion, and probably other processes as well, may all contribute to spectators' experiences in the theater. These active, though sometimes unconscious, processes confirm that spectators always participate in the creation of a performance's meaning and their experience of it, at least to some degree. Some forms of performance will make higher cognitive and imaginative demands on their spectators than others, and the Greek tragic theater, as I hope to show, strongly encouraged such imaginative participation and cooperative creation in its spectators.

The Battle over the Arm-Rest: And Other Elements of Context

As I have just suggested, the specific context of a theatrical performance can have a significant effect on the spectators' experience. An outdoor performance in the afternoon sun may, for example, enhance the communal sharing of emotion and experience, while a performance in an indoor theater with a darkened house may increase individual variation and, perhaps, heighten individual projection-identification. In *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, Susan Bennett provides a useful analysis of many of the possible elements of context that could influence spectators' experience in the theater. For example, she suggests that if tickets for a particular show are in high demand and difficult to get, that can add to the excitement and experience of the event, even before spectators arrive at the theater (101). Similarly, a spectator who plans far in advance to attend a performance will have longer to build up specific expectations than a spectator who decides to attend just before the performance begins (124). The particular conditions that spectators encounter when they first enter the auditorium also contribute to their expectations and their preparation for the performance: if the lights are low, the audience:

...is reminded of its purpose in being at the theatre. The subdued lights encourage a subdued atmosphere in the auditorium at large, and prepare the audience for interpretive activity. Conversely, a well-lit auditorium continues the element of social display encouraged by the theatre foyer. The moment when the lights are dimmed then becomes a significant

instruction to the audience as well as a means to heighten anticipation quickly and effectively. (135)

Bennett thus explores these and a range of other elements of context, showing how everything from the program to the curtain call can affect spectators' interpretation and experience of a performance.

Bennett also addresses the importance of the audience as a group, though her methodology does not involve the neuroscience research that McConachie highlights. Without using the term "emotional contagion," she argues for the existence of such a phenomenon: "In almost all cases laughter, derision, and applause are infectious. The audience, through homogeneity of reception, receives confirmation of their decoding on an individual and private basis and is encouraged to suppress counter-readings in favour of the reception generally shared (Elam 1980: 96-97; Ubersfeld 1981: 306)" (153). This tendency toward shared reception may be a positive or negative quality. On the one hand, it may suppress valuable diversity that could be meaningful to individual spectators, particularly of cultural backgrounds that comprise a minority of the audience, but on the other hand, it also brings people together and may encourage feelings of unity or even an impulse to work toward social change in the real world.

The simple context of being in a theater together encourages spectators to become a temporary community, an idea at the center of Jill Dolan's *Utopia in Performance*, and it is this latter possibility, one of audience unity and social change, that Dolan finds inspiring about the theater. As Dolan explains in her introduction,

Utopia in Performance ... examines the audience as a group of people who have elected to spend an evening or an afternoon not only with a

set of performers enacting a certain narrative arc or aesthetic trajectory, but with a group of other people, sometimes familiar, sometimes strange. I see, in this social choice, potential for intersubjectivity not only between performer and spectators but among the audience, as well. Audiences form temporary communities, sites of public discourse that, along with the intense experiences of utopian performatives, can model new investments in and interactions with variously constituted public spheres. (10)

Once created, the temporary community of a theatrical audience may affect the performance itself, as well as the after-effects of the performance if, as Dolan hopes, that community and the energy it generates can linger after the show ends, encouraging spectators to feel hopeful for the possibility of a better world.

Dolan recounts many of her own experiences in a variety of theatrical contexts throughout *Utopia in Performance*, and in each case, the context of that performance is a significant factor in the way the audience comes together and the way she remembers her experience. For example, when discussing performances done as part of artists' residencies at a university, she suggests that "[t]he festival or series format extends the temporary public the audience constitutes across a longer period of time, a condition that facilitates utopian performatives" (25-26). In her discussion of *The Laramie Project*, she considers the importance of the geographic and cultural location of the performance, wondering "Perhaps, too, Austin is just that much closer to Laramie, compared to New York, which kept performers and audiences respectful instead of condescending" (129). For any given performance, then, the various

elements of context help to shape the audience's temporary community, affecting the collective experience as well as individual spectators' experiences.

Given the importance of context for the spectators' experience, a cognitivist approach to performance and spectatorship is most successful when coupled with a historicist approach. While cognitive psychologists and theorists have provided new information about how all human minds work, they have also confirmed that some processes involve a strong influence from an individual's culture and personal experience. Thus, although the cognitivist approach may seem to be ahistoricist, cognitive theory and historicism can actually work well in conjunction with one another, as I hope they will do here. To provide some of the relevant historicist background, then, we should turn now to some elements of the context of the ancient Greek theater. What kinds of conditions might have shaped the imaginings of the spectators in classical Athens?

Part Two: Introduction to the Classical Greek Theater

What exactly do we know about the theater of classical Greece, and how do we know it? Broadly speaking, our evidence is either archaeological, including excavations of theaters and pottery or other artifacts, or textual, including the dramatic texts themselves as well as fragments, inscriptions, and references in non-dramatic texts. Our evidence is limited in many respects, and what we do have has sparked widely divergent interpretations and positions on the issues. Despite such complications, an overview of the evidence and arguments related to a few of the

major issues will be helpful as we move forward to an exploration of seeing, hearing, and imagining the performance of Greek tragedy.

Narrowing the Scope: Chronology, Geography, and Genre

The origins and early history of Greek theater remain murky: much of our evidence for the earliest performances comes from vase paintings of the seventh and sixth centuries BC that show revelers or dancers of various sorts (“komasts”), while inscriptions and fragments determine a few dates by which certain innovations must have arisen. We do not know the precise nature of the early performances, but such forms and events as festival processions, athletic competitions, and choral performance (later, formal dithyramb) preceded, influenced, and coexisted with the theatrical genres of tragedy, comedy, and satyr play that developed into their recognizable forms later in the sixth century and into the fifth.¹¹

“Komasts,” male revelers, are common subjects in early Greek vase painting. These figures are depicted with many variations, but they are almost always dancing, often while drinking, and their assumed connection to Dionysus and their engagement in a kind of performance (dancing) have led to speculations that they could be one of the early sources for Greek drama. In her recent study of early komast vases, primarily black-figure vases of the sixth and early fifth centuries BC, Tyler Jo Smith has corrected the misapprehension that the majority of these komasts are “padded

¹¹ While an extensive discussion of the origins of the Greek theater is not the province of this brief introduction, I would direct the reader to Csapo and Slater’s *Context of Ancient Drama*, Chapter II, “Origins of Greek Drama” for a thorough survey of the evidence (p. 89-101).

dancers,” which more closely relate to later theatrical practice, particularly costume. Smith explains: “In a few instances, we shall notice a dancer of the familiar type participating in what may be interpreted as early comic parody. In other rare examples, the revellers might be wearing masks or padded costumes, both fundamental elements of later staged drama. There are occurrences of possible cross-dressing or of play-acting, rather than dancing,” but although these examples have been the focus of much of the scholarship on komast vases, they “are notably few and far between” in comparison with the larger collection of komast works (10-11, 10).¹²

We do not know to what extent these vases might reflect Greek practices, particularly symposia, but the vases and references in literature do suggest that such reveling had a performative element, and thus scholars make connections to the development of formal, public theatrical performance: “We imagine how such intimate, informal performances, encompassing sung poetry and dance movement, may have developed into more large-scale, formal ones” (Smith 11). While Smith’s work has shown that we should not overemphasize the importance of komast vases for the origins of formal drama, the performative element of the vases nevertheless points toward the developing interest in public performance, even if the vases are less reliable as sources for specific practices.

Several vases from the middle of the sixth century are of particular interest for the origins of drama, with much closer connections to later practice than most of the komast vases present. This group of vases seems to prefigure the animal choruses of

¹² For images of many of these komast vases, see the Plates section at the end of Smith’s book.

Old Comedy, depicting men riding animals, or men costumed as animals, including horses, dolphins, and ostriches. Jeffrey Rusten has discussed the major pieces and their implications for the origins of comedy in his 2006 article, “Who ‘Invented’ Comedy?,” and while he cautions that these vases cannot be taken as explicit illustrations of performances, particularly due to the outlandish nature of the men riding animals, he also contends that “it is of course also quite possible that in an original performance men were dressed as the animals to be ridden and that these animals have been transformed by the painter into their real counterparts, in the same way that tragic myths are later illustrated ‘realistically’ without any hint of the theater” (52).¹³ These vases may have been inspired by some kind of performance, comic or not,¹⁴ even though they do not explicitly represent performances. While not depicting a theatrical performance, a fragment of a vase from the early sixth century already depicts an audience sitting in bleachers, here to watch the funeral games for Patroclus, a scene taken from Book 23 of the *Iliad*. Although this image involves spectators watching athletic contests, rather than choral performance of some sort, the fragment

¹³ Rusten’s article also provides images of several of the most famous of these vases, including the Berlin *Knights* and Oltos’ *Dolphin Riders*.

¹⁴ Rusten suggests that dithyramb may be a better contender: “The reason these vases had all been connected with Old Comedy was the inherent silliness of an animal-riding chorus. Yet apart from this incongruity, there is nothing else about a chorus of men, often in armor but never costumed or masked, riding animals (often dolphins) to the accompaniment of the pipe, that necessitates Old Comedy. If there is any kind of choral performance underlying the images, it would be easier to think rather of the early dithyramb, sung and danced by a male chorus to the accompaniment of the pipe, that flourished and diversified in sixth-century Athens” (52).

is useful for thinking about performance, broadly construed, in that it serves as an example of how one sixth-century painter imagined an audience.¹⁵

As we proceed later in the sixth century, inscriptions and fragments supplement the visual evidence for performance. There are still many uncertainties about the nature and chronology of early performances, but the traditional date for the first official performance of tragedies in Athens is 534 BC. Our evidence for this date comes from the Parian Marble inscription, which itself dates to 264/3 BC, and which provides this note on tragic competition at the place for 534 BC in its list of major events: “From the time when Thespis the poet first [act]ed, who produced a [dr]a[ma in the c]it[y], and the goat was established as the [prize], 250 [plus ??] years have elapsed, the archon in Ath[ens being ...]naios, the Elder” (Csapo and Slater 120).¹⁶ Thespis and his “first drama” are legendary, and we do not know much more about these earliest performances, which may have strayed very little from the choral dithyramb at first.¹⁷ By the beginning of the fifth century BC, however, the dramatic competition had become more firmly established and had come to involve three

¹⁵ Fragment of a dinos by Sophilos. Funeral games of Patroclus. Ca. 580-570BC. Athens, National Museum item A 15499. An image is available on the National Museum’s website (<http://www.namuseum.gr/collections/vases/archaic/archaic12-en.html>).

¹⁶ Part III, source 45 in Csapo and Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, p. 120.

¹⁷ For more on the dithyramb, see Armand D’Angour’s very good article “How the Dithyramb Got Its Shape.” Focusing particularly on a fragment from Pindar, D’Angour argues that the dithyramb was originally performed with choreuts dancing in a line but that the sixth-century Lasos of Hermione changed the shape to semi-circular, giving the aulos player a central position from which to keep the choreuts in unison, particularly with troublesome sibilant (“s”) sounds. D’Angour suggests that this change occurred after tragedy had begun to break away into its own form, with rectilinear choral dancing similar to the original dithyramb shape.

competitors, each with a tetralogy of three tragedies and a satyr play. Performances of comedies were added to the City Dionysia, also called the Great Dionysia, in 486 BC.

Aeschylus won his first competition in 484 BC, and inscriptions of lists of victors provide dates for some, though far from all, of our extant tragedies. These extant tragedies date to the fifth century BC, with the likely exception of *Rhesus*, which is traditionally attributed to Euripides but seems to be later and quite different in style.¹⁸ One of our best-attested dates is that for the production of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy in 458 BC, a year for which the complete entry on a victor list survives. Our oldest extant plays are Aeschylus' *Persians* (472 BC), *Seven against Thebes*, and *Suppliant Women*, while the latest surviving tragedies are Euripides' *Bacchae* (405 BC) and Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (401 BC), both of which were produced posthumously. Tragedy continued into the fourth century, but our evidence becomes much more fragmentary, and re-performances of "old tragedy" joined productions of new plays.

¹⁸ Euripides did write a *Rhesus*, but many scholars now believe that the play we have is not his. David Kovacs summarizes the argument about authenticity in his introduction to the Loeb edition, concluding: "So [due to the "monotonously bombastic characters" and repetitive language,] the chief line of defense for those who believe Euripides wrote our *Rhesus* is to say that it is a work of his youth. This cannot be disproved, but I think it more likely that at some point a *Rhesus* by an unknown poet of the fourth century was mistaken for the by then lost *Rhesus* of Euripides" (352). The standard work in favor of Euripidean authorship is William Ritchie's *The Authenticity of the Rhesus of Euripides*. A more recent and methodologically unique approach, yielding a conclusion that the play is stylistically incompatible with Euripides' early and middle works but deviates less from the style of his late works, is Bernd Ludwig's 1997 article, "A Contribution to the Question of Authenticity of *Rhesus* Using Part-of-Speech Tagging." (See especially p. 241 for his interpretation of the results of his statistical study.)

The Greek theater involved productions outside of Athens, through the Rural Dionysia in deme theaters, as well as productions both before and after the fifth century BC, but my scope here will be limited to the original performances of tragedies in fifth-century Athens. Despite the very serious problem of theater being a live, visual, and aural art form, the texts of the plays are our best evidence for the Greek theater, and I will accordingly focus my study within the chronological limits of that evidence. The brief chronology I have provided here simply sketches a broad trajectory for tragic performance in Athens and should serve as a general framework for the reader unfamiliar with Greek theater.¹⁹

θέατρον [*Theatron*]: The Physical Space

The θέατρον [*theatron*] is, by definition, a place for seeing. What, then, is the nature of this place? Into what sort of orientation did spectators enter when taking their seats? What could they see in front of them, before the performance began? We are in a somewhat privileged position for this issue, since the physical spaces where plays were performed still exist, but they do so with the complications of varying degrees of changes, from centuries of rebuildings, mining for materials, excavations, and weather. The archaeological evidence has given rise to a variety of reconstructions and interpretations, particularly at the Theater of the Sanctuary of Dionysus Eleuthereus in Athens, where our extant tragedies were first performed.

¹⁹ Csapo and Slater's *Context of Ancient Drama* features a useful timeline as Appendix B (p. 403-406).

Theaters in other cities and from later dates are often better preserved, since they were not subjected to the many rebuildings that occurred in Athens. In *Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning*, David Wiles provides a useful study of these theaters in demes such as Rhamnous and Ikarion. Wiles is not always very careful to keep his discussions in chronological context,²⁰ which weakens the ensuing conclusions he draws about the Theater of Dionysus in Athens, but his survey of the deme theaters is nevertheless a concise and evocative exploration of those physical spaces and their meanings.

For the purpose of serving as an example of a deme theater, the theater at Thorikos is particularly valuable. As Wiles notes, this is the only Greek theater that has survived more or less in its fifth-century form, which makes it especially useful for imagining fifth-century performance spaces. Thorikos features a rectangular performance space, with a temple to Dionysus on one side and an altar on the other, and the seating forms a sort of partial rectangle with rounded but relatively tight curves at the corners. The land drops off behind the theater, and a cemetery lies at the bottom. In his discussion of the theater, Wiles notes that while this theater seems to be awkwardly shaped, “these sacred elements have primacy, and the auditorium is arranged in order to accommodate cult activity” (31).

²⁰ Most of the deme theaters that Wiles discusses date to the fourth century, but he uses them to imagine the fifth-century theater in Athens. Further, he discusses the theaters at Megalopolis (360s) and Epidauros (330-320) alongside a few earlier theaters, such as the fifth-century theater in Thorikos. Wiles does note the dates for these most of the theaters as he introduces them, but when he transitions to his discussion of the Theater of Dionysus, this already limited chronology seems to fade to the background, as he moves freely among Epidauros, Thorikos, and others.

This space was used for drama, but, as Wiles explains, it seems better suited to “choral and processional forms of presentation,” with its very wide playing space and lack of a clear focal point, and this may be key to understanding the unique nature of deme theaters as compared to the Theater of Dionysus in Athens (33). Deme theaters must have been multi-purpose spaces, to a greater extent than the Theater of Dionysus. Smaller cities and towns had fewer places for public gatherings, and theatrical performances would have been only a small percentage of the events held in those theaters. In the case of Thorikos, Wiles notes that there were about “sixty annual sacrifices at Thorikos, and the altar must have been the major deme altar for there is no evidence of a separate *agora*” (34). The dramatic performances of the Rural Dionysia may seem quite minor by comparison with the other community needs for the space.

One of the most significant differences between the Theater of Dionysus and theaters in the demes is simply the scale. The theater at Thorikos, for example, held 2,000-3,000 spectators before the seating area was enlarged in the fourth century, while the Theater of Dionysus may have held as many as 15,000, or even up to 30,000, if one accepts Plato’s rather unlikely estimate.²¹ The City Dionysia was a much larger festival than those celebrated in the demes, and numerous sources indicate that it drew a crowd of foreigners in addition to locals, a feature facilitated by its scheduling in the springtime, specifically the month of Elaphebolion, when the

²¹ I discuss this issue of capacity below, pages 37-38.

weather was beginning to accommodate such travel.²² The festivals of the Rural Dionysia, on the other hand, most likely all took place during Posideion, which roughly corresponds with our December, when travel was possible but more difficult (Csapo and Slater 121). It seems that these festivals did not occur all on the same day and that travel between them was possible, but they surely did not draw large external crowds. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates' interlocutor Glaucon mocks those theater-lovers ["φιλοθεάμονες"] who "run around to hear all the choruses in the Dionysia, not leaving out any, whether in the cities or in the villages" [ἐπακοῦσαι πάντων χορῶν περιθέουσι τοῖς Διονυσίοις, οὔτε τῶν κατὰ πόλεις οὔτε τῶν κατὰ κώμας ἀπολειπόμενοι] (Book V, 475d.5).²³ From this passage, we can conjecture that the festivals were scheduled in such a way as to make this travel possible, but Glaucon is also treating such behavior as laughable, which resonates best if it was indeed the province only of dedicated theater-addicts. Further, Glaucon's distinction between "cities" [πόλεις] and "villages" [κώμας] confirms that some festivals must have been larger than others, depending on the size and resources of the town.

While there was undoubtedly some variation, most of the fifth-century rural theaters must have been quite small in comparison to the theater in Athens, and this

²² For sources on foreigners at the City Dionysia, see especially Csapo and Slater's sources 122-125 in section IVBi, "The Athenian Audience in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C." (p. 290-291). Aristophanes' *Acharnians* 501-508 provides particularly strong contemporary evidence, with Dicaeopolis announcing that he can speak freely because he is at the Lenaea, without the foreigners and tribute presentation of the Dionysia.

²³ This translation is my own, and all translations from Greek in this dissertation are my own unless otherwise noted. The Greek texts of ancient plays that I quote are from the most recent Loeb Classical Library editions, and the first section of the Works Cited, "Primary Texts, Commentaries, and Lexica" includes references for all of the Greek texts I cite.

creates different conditions for the audience and the performers. As David Wiles summarizes: “In the deme theatres, where collective self-awareness was not a problem because the scale was intimate, rectilinear playing spaces were not sealed confrontational stages, but were surrounded by an encircling auditorium and opened into the thoroughfares of the deme” (52). Thus, although many deme theaters are better preserved than the theater in Athens, it is very risky to use those theaters as evidence for the fifth-century form of the Theater of Dionysus. The rural theaters simply filled different needs in very different kinds of communities, and in different physical locations with their own unique topographical constraints. Epidauros has become the most vivid image of the Greek theater for moderns, with its nearly perfect circles, impressive acoustics, and excellent preservation, and yet its late date of construction (330-320 BC) makes it particularly unsuitable as a basis of comparison. Despite these many complications and provisions, we should turn now to the Theater of Dionysus in Athens, where Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides staged their plays.

The Theater of the Sanctuary of Dionysus Eleuthereus in Athens has naturally garnered the most interest of all the ancient theaters, since our extant plays had their original performances in that space, and yet there is little that we can say little about it with certainty.²⁴ As Csapo and Slater summarize: “Most of the evidence has been destroyed: the theater was frequently rebuilt in antiquity, used as a marble quarry in the Middle Ages and subject to the experiments of early archaeology in the 19th c. The

²⁴ The earliest performances were done somewhere in the agora, but we do not know where or what kinds of temporary structures might have been used. The move to the hillside of the acropolis must have represented some heightened degree of permanence, even though its own structures remained wooden and “temporary” for many years to come.

Archaic remains are scant and their interpretation disputed” (*CAD* 79). Indeed, scholars have used the archaeological evidence in service of many different reconstructions that remain highly contested.

In a 2000 article, Jean-Charles Moretti compiled much of the archaeological evidence and the resulting interpretations for the Theater of Dionysus. While offering his own synthesis of the material, Moretti is careful to stay very close to the evidence, and while his results may not offer a fully imagined sense of the theater space, they are very useful as a starting point for considering the complex evidence and the basic shape of this space. Summarizing some of the specific findings and the history of major excavations and interpretations, Moretti explains:

There are many different ways to combine and interpret these remains, which moreover have been variously dated. Dörpfeld associated R, V, and Q to reconstruct a large circular orchestra, somewhat displaced to the southeast in comparison with the orchestra of the second half of the fourth century. Fiechter resolutely criticized the association of R, V, and Q, and he established that Cutting V was not curved and that Q not only did not follow a curvilinear course, but was very different in masonry technique from R/SM1. (Moretti 392)²⁵

This contrast between Wilhelm Dörpfeld, who excavated the site in the 1880s, and Ernst Fiechter, who did his own excavations and published new reconstructions in the 1930s, is the beginning of the highly contested argument about the shape of the playing space. Scholars remain sharply divided about whether the original orchestra

²⁵ See Moretti for drawings of the stones and other remains of note.

was round, as it is in Epidauros, or roughly rectangular, as it is in many of the deme theaters.

There remains no clear scholarly consensus on the shape of the original orchestra. David Wiles makes a strong case for a round orchestra by arguing that the dithyramb was the primary event at the City Dionysia and that a round performance space would best accommodate the circular dancing of a fifty-person chorus, and yet Armand D'Angour has suggested that tragedy may have emerged before dithyramb settled into its circular shape, which would significantly weaken Wiles's reasoning (Wiles (1997) 49; D'Angour 347-348). Ultimately, all of these arguments are based on the evidence of a few stones, theaters in very different contexts, and inferences about the demands the performances themselves place on the performance space. While certainly regretting that we have no conclusive evidence, we must, I think, admit that our imaginings of the shape of the playing space often have more to do with our own preferences and preconceptions than with concrete archeological evidence.

The shape of the playing space may be ambiguous, but we do have some indications of its size, though still not firmly conclusive. Moretti summarizes:

More than 30 m. separate the virtual northward extension of this drain and the west side of the Odeion of Pericles. About 14 m. separate the line of the drain from the axis of the fourth-century koilon.

Assuming that this axis is the same as that of the fifth-century koilon—an assumption that is by no means assured—the Classical orchestra would have extended some 28 m. east to west at the point where it is met by the parodoi. (Moretti 395-396)

The orchestra, then, was less than thirty meters across, at the point where the chorus entered and exited. This width may seem quite large by comparison to modern theaters: it is more than twice the width of the stage at the new Globe Theatre in London or the Broadway Theatre in New York. On the other hand, we could think of it as approximately 38 yards: less than half the width of an American football field, the stadiums for which may accommodate more than 100,000 spectators in some of the largest examples. Perhaps it is difficult to imagine watching a play on this scale, but we need not think of the scale as entirely foreign to our own experience, when most of us have some experience watching the crucial movements of players in outdoor field sports.

The fifth-century theater may or may not have included a raised stage for actors. Interaction between actors and chorus is very important to many of the tragedies, so it seems unlikely that actors were confined solely to a separate stage. There was a *skênê*, a building that provided a backdrop and at least one central door for entrances and exits to and from an interior space: “A wooden stage-building of one storey was erected for performances in front of the central section of the koilon. It had no second floor, but a flat roof which was usable for performance” (Moretti 397). This *skênê* was originally wooden and temporary, though it is unclear just how long each *skênê* would remain in place. We do not know when the *skênê* was added to the theater, and Oliver Taplin has noted that the only Aeschylean plays requiring a building as a background and usable interior space are those of the *Oresteia*, which gives us only a date by which the *skênê* must have been added, that is, 458 BC (Taplin (1977) 454). There is some argument over whether the fifth-century *skênê* had more

than one door, but as Oliver Taplin has shown, the extant tragedies themselves do not demand multiple doors, so it is most likely that additional side doors were added only later²⁶ (Taplin (1977) 439-440).

The very schematic, highly limited sketch we can develop of the Theater of Dionysus in Athens may be disheartening. If we are seeking a precise reconstruction of the theater and the performances that took place there, we will always be frustrated in that search, and it will ultimately draw us away from endeavors that might be more fruitful. While it would be irresponsible to neglect the facts we do have and to indulge fully in our personal flights of fancy, we also must accept that this is an inevitable element in our study of the ancient Greek theater and that taking a wider view, focusing on the spirit of the performances, their the larger dynamics and meanings, may sometimes be the best we can do.

θεαταί [*Theatai*]: Spectators in the Theater

The physical space of a theater involves not only the performance space, but also the audience space, and again, the current remains of the Theater of Dionysus can be misleading. Most of the remnants of seats we see built into the hillside of the acropolis today actually belong to Lycurgus' rebuilding of the auditorium in stone in the late fourth century, and even before this, modifications were made to the theater at various points, and it is difficult to determine the precise state of the theater at any one time. For example, the addition of the Odeon of Pericles, built ca. 440 BC, likely

²⁶ Many New Comedies demand at least two doors, so it is clear that additional doors became available at some point.

shifted the layout of the theater somewhat, and there may have been several attempts to increase the steepness of the embankment by adding fill (Csapo and Slater 79-80).

Nevertheless, we do know, at least, that the auditorium of the fifth century was not entirely of stone: most of the audience, in fact, sat on wooden bleachers, perhaps similar to those depicted on the vase fragment of the funeral games of Patroclus. Jean-Charles Moretti summarizes these two seating options: "...rows of seats in stone and rows of wooden benches raised upon scaffolding. The stone seats bordered the orchestra. This can be deduced from the presence among them of inscriptions marking them as part of the *prohedria*, and from the existence of other Classical and Hellenistic theaters where only the *prohedria* is built of stone" (Moretti 386). The *prohedria*, "front-seating," was set aside for guests of honor, such as public officials, foreign dignitaries, and those being recognized for particular service to the city. That others sat on wooden bleachers is very clear from several sources, including a fragment from the comic playwright Cratinus: "Hail, O greatly-laughing-at-stupidities-crowd, best of all judges of our wisdom on the days after the festival. Blessed bore you your mother, the noise of the wooden bleachers" (Csapo and Slater 300, Source IV.154).²⁷

The size of the audience space sets it firmly apart from modern theaters, with a distance between spectacle and spectator that we might now find only in large-scale sporting events. In Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates remarks that the previous day, Agathon (the tragic playwright, who also appears as a character in the *Symposium*)

²⁷ For further evidence, see also Csapo and Slater's sources IV.130, p. 291-292 (a passage from Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria*, lines 390-397, that refers to wooden bleachers), IV.153, p. 300 (scholion to that passage), and IV.169, p. 303 (a passage from Pollux).

shone forth his wisdom before more than thirty thousand Greeks [“πλέον ἢ τριμυρίοις”] (175e). Despite this grand statement, excavation suggests that the auditorium could not hold nearly that many people, though the capacity was still very large. Moretti provides a concise synthesis of the measurements and estimates that lead to the current approximation of 15,000 as a maximum capacity:

More than 30 m. separate the virtual northward extension of this drain and the west side of the Odeion of Pericles. This permitted the installation of some forty-five rows of benches at a depth of 0.65 m. each. Supposing that this many benches were actually built and that the other two branches of the koilon were of similar size, we can estimate that the theater held from 10,000 to 15,000 spectators, if we allow each a seating space of 0.40 m. (Moretti 395)

Even the small end of this estimate is a very large crowd, and we can imagine some of the effects that might have on the spectators’ experience.

Scholars have long debated the composition of this audience. The theater was certainly large, but it does not seem possible that it could have held the entire population of Athens, as well as crowds of foreigners bringing tribute or just coming for the festival. Nevertheless, we have no evidence that attendance was ever restricted, at least not in any formal way, and indeed, there are sources that suggest that members of such marginalized groups as women, metics (resident aliens), and slaves were present, though perhaps not in large numbers. The question of women’s participation has been particularly contentious, but Csapo and Slater’s compilation of evidence in *The Context of Ancient Drama* makes a very convincing case for women in the

audience. As they contend, “In our opinion, the testimony of ancient authors shows clearly that women (and boys) were present in the audience (124, 126-29, 155, 156, 172). The contrary argument rests mainly upon the comic poets’ habit of addressing the audience as ‘gentlemen.’ This fails to distinguish physical from ideological forms of exclusion” (286). They concede that the number of women may have been “disproportionately small,” but their sources nevertheless seem to imagine a diverse audience (287).

Two passages from Plato serve as particularly strong evidence for this diversity in the composition of the audience. In the dialogue *Gorgias*, written ca. 390 BC but set in 427 BC, Socrates turns to the theater for an example, when debating the techniques and intentions of rhetoric: “SOCRATES: Or don’t you think the poets practice rhetoric in the theaters? KALLIAS: I do. SOCRATES: So now we’ve discovered a kind of rhetoric directed at a public composed of children together with women and men, slave and free” (Csapo and Slater 291, source IV.127, *Gorgias* 502d). The diversity of the audience is critical to Socrates’ reference here, as he builds his argument that orators are more interested in entertaining than in improving their audiences. In a well known passage from *Laws*, Plato categorizes the artistic tastes of the public by age and gender, implying that women and children were exposed to these performances: “ATHENIAN: If the very young children were to judge <the best performance> they would choose the magician; ...if the older children, the comic poet; the educated among the women, the young men, and just about the bulk of the crowd would choose tragedy” (Csapo and Slater 291, source IV.128, *Laws* 658c-d). From these sources, alongside others in Csapo and Slater’s compilation, we should reconstruct an audience

that includes members of all sectors of the Athenian population, as well as foreigners, though we might still conjecture that male citizens comprised the majority of the audience.

The diversity of the audience did not end with social position and background: as Plato's categorization of the public's tastes suggests, the artistic and intellectual backgrounds of the spectators must have varied just as widely. Martin Revermann's 2006 article "The Competence of Theatre Audiences in Fifth- and Fourth-Century Athens" provides a useful strategy for approaching the problem of uncovering the degree and range of competence of these audiences, beginning with his definition of competence: "If the theatrical event can be described as a complex exchange of signs between actors and audience, competence in theatrical communication is the ability to decode and encode those signs" (105). Revermann proposes that two unique qualities of the Athenian theater must have particularly influenced audience's competences: citizens' participation in theater as members of choruses for both dithyramb and drama,²⁸ and "continuous exposure to an art form as conservative (in formal terms) as Athenian drama, in a cultural environment which called for, and trained, skill-sets not dissimilar to those needed for theatrical competence in the contexts of ritual, the symposium and military training" (107). The audience for Greek theater was certainly

²⁸ Revermann contextualizes this point with a calculation that between 1,117 and 1,165 men and boys (617-665 adults) performed in choruses for each year's Dionysia, assuming that the chorus for each play of a tetralogy was composed of the same members. He estimates that this figure would represent approximately 2%-4% of the adult citizen population (108). Assuming that the same citizens did not participate year after year, this would, of course, result in a larger percentage of the population that would have performed in a chorus at some point in their lives. Revermann also postulates that the choreuts likely came from diverse backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the *demos* (111).

stratified, but it seems likely, from Revermann's study, that elite and non-elite alike shared a large body of common experiences, which resulted in a relatively high degree of competence as spectators. The playwrights, then, endeavored to strike a successful balance between under- and over-challenging that audience.

The Stuff of the Theater: Costumes, Masks, and Machinery

Our evidence for the physical trappings of the theater may be our most confusing yet. On the one hand, vase paintings provide excellent evidence for the costumes, masks, props, and stagings of comedy,²⁹ but on the other hand, vase paintings tell us almost nothing about tragedy. Richard Green poses the problem aptly:

All too few pictures survive of classical Greek actors acting tragedy.

There are good reasons for this, the principal of which is the convention that vase-painters (and doubtless, therefore, the purchasers of their vases) were governed by the sense of the story conveyed by the performance. Thus, what is usually depicted on vases is not the process of performance but what the audience was persuaded to see, as it were the 'real' Agamemnon of Greek myth—history rather than the actor playing that role. (Green 93)

As tempting as it might be, we cannot use vase paintings of tragic scenes as evidence for how those scenes were actually staged in performance. Comic scenes tend to be painted with a clear foregrounding of the performance context, often showing the

²⁹ For images and interpretations of comic scenes in visual art, see Oliver Taplin's excellent 1993 study, *Comic Angels: And Other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase-Paintings*.

stage itself, but just as overt metatheatrical references are absent from the texts of tragedies, any theatrical apparatus of whatever performance might have been the source for a painting of a tragic scene disappear entirely in that painting.

Regarding costumes, vase paintings reveal the padded, grotesque styles of comedy, but we have less evidence for the other genres. The Pronomos Vase, a red-figure volute-krater from the late fifth-century, is one of our best sources for costumes and masks: it depicts actors, some for a satyr play and some possibly for a tragedy, shortly before or after a performance, in various levels of costume.³⁰ Many hold their masks, giving us an excellent view of mask shape and style, and some play instruments or practice dance steps. From this and a few other vases,³¹ we know that masks enclosed the whole head of the performer, not just the face, and included a wig and/or facial hair, as appropriate for the character. Richard Green describes the style of tragic masks in the depictions we have as “very simple, almost plain... The features and hair are not in any way exaggerated” (Green 99). According to Green’s synthesis of the visual evidence, costumes were likewise simple and similar to everyday dress early in the fifth century, but: “It is the vases of the later fifth century which appear to demonstrate the development of a distinctive theatre costume of a kind that is both

³⁰ Images of the Pronomos Vase are readily available in many sources, including the website of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (<http://museoarcheologiconazionale.campaniabeniculturali.it/thematic-views/image-gallery/RA84/view>), the new and richly illustrated *The Pronomos Vase and Its Context* (ed. Oliver Taplin and Rosie Wyles, 2010), and Csapo and Slater’s *Context of Ancient Drama* (as a line drawing, Plate 8). Naples inv. 81673 (H 3240).

³¹ See, for example, the famous “Würzburg Actor” fragment, reproduced in Taplin’s *Comic Angels*, as illustration 22.118 (held by the Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität Würzburg, item L832).

different in cut and composition from, as well as more elaborate than, that of the well-dressed person of everyday life” (Green 97).

In keeping with this gradual transition in the fifth century, costumes in the Hellenistic period became more elaborate, and this is the period for which Pollux’s lexicon, the *Onomasticon*, gives us lists of specific theatrical items, including costume pieces.³² Although introductory courses and textbooks on theater history and the Greek theater often include such pieces as buskins (high boots worn for tragedy) in their general picture of the Greek stage, these more complex and stylized costumes actually belong to the Hellenistic theater, not the theater of the fifth century.³³

As with costumes, the Pronomos Vase gives us some evidence for stage properties, such as staffs, thyrsos, and the lion skin one actor carries, slung over one

³² Sections 115-120 of the *Onomasticon* cover costumes and props, and a translation of relevant sections of the lexicon is available as Appendix A of Csapo and Slater’s *Context of Ancient Drama* (p. 393-402). As is appropriate for his lexicon format, Pollux’s discussion is list-like: “...footwear in tragedy are buskins (*kothornoi*) and *embades* (“step-ins”); while *embatai* are comic. Tragic clothes are the *poikilon* (“embroidered”)—so the *chiton* was called—and the overgarments are the *xystis*, *batrachis* (“frog-colored”), *chlanis*, gilded *chlamys*, gilt-edged, the *statos*, *phoinikis* (“scarlet cloak”)...” (Csapo and Slater 395).

³³ Rosie Wyles explores this problem in her essay on tragic costume on the Pronomos Vase. She notes that expectations often interfere with interpretation of the evidence on the vase, using Herakles’ shoes as an example: “The predominant interpretation of this footwear demonstrates a classic case of the type of ‘misreading’ which I have already described. The viewer comes to the image with the assumption that since the actors are in ‘standard’ costume they must be wearing tragic buskins—hence this is what the viewer sees on Herakles’ feet and he is described as wearing *kothornoi*. Yet if we shed our preconceptions and look closely at the footwear, we see that Herakles is not wearing boots at all, but shoes with upturned toes and patterned greaves on his legs” (237). Wyles ultimately argues that there was not a single, standard shoe or boot for tragic actors in the fifth century but that “if a tragic actor or chorus member is depicted in boots, these should not be assumed to be worn through the necessity of tragic convention, but rather that they, like any other part of the costume, should be assumed to have been chosen because they are appropriate to, and significant for, the role being played” (239).

shoulder, to complement his Heracles costume. Visual evidence for props in comedy, as for costumes, is plentiful, and both the texts and the vase paintings suggest that comedy often featured many and varied props, from baskets and jars to dead geese and wine-skin “babies.”³⁴ Tragedy likely involved fewer props, as we can infer not only from the texts of the tragedies, but also from Aristophanes’ mockery of Euripides’ overuse of props in *Acharnians* 448-489. If Euripides’ surplus of theatrical props, which Dicaeopolis wants to borrow in preparation for his speech to the people, is to be funny, it must be in some way noteworthy, by comparison with the prop usage other plays by other tragedians. This brief gloss on props in the Greek theater will suffice for this introduction, but I will return to the topic in more detail in Chapter 2, “Objects of Imagination.”

Greek stagecraft included the *skênê*, costumes, masks, props, and two pieces of machinery for creating special effects: the *ekkyklema* and the *mêchanê* (crane). The *ekkyklema* was some kind of device that revealed an interior scene, probably by rolling out a platform through the central door of the *skênê*. Aristophanes parodies this machinery in the *Acharnians*, as the tragedian Euripides grudgingly orders himself “ekkyklema-ed out” to meet the insistent Dicaeopolis outside his door:

{ΔΙ.} ἀλλ’ ἐκκυκλήθητ’.

{ΕΥ.} ἀλλ’ ἀδύνατον.

³⁴ At least two surviving vases feature a goose, including a red-figure calyx-krater with a dead goose at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (ca. 400-390 BC) and a bell krater with a live goose at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (ca. 370 BC). The wine-skin “baby,” from Aristophanes’ *Women at the Thesmophoria*, appears on a bell krater held at the Martin von Wagner-Museum, University of Würzburg. Images of all three of these vases are available in Taplin’s *Comic Angels* as illustrations 10.2, 11.3, and 11.4 (in the section of illustrations following page 36).

{ΔΙ.} ἀλλ' ὅμως.

{ΕΥ.} ἀλλ' ἐκκυκλήσομαι· καταβαίνειν δ' οὐ σχολή. (407-409)

DICAEOPOLIS: Well, have yourself wheeled out! [literally,
“ekkyklema-ed”]

EURIPIDES: No, it's not possible.

DIC.: But all the same...

EUR.: Fine, I will be wheeled out, but I don't have free time to come
down.

Tragedies themselves sometimes indicate the use of the *ekkyklema* with cue lines, as a character prepares the audience for the revelation of a scene inside the house or other structure. Tecmessa and the Chorus provide this cue in *Ajax*, for example, before the interior scene of Ajax with his slaughtered livestock is revealed:

{ΧΟ.} ἀνὴρ φρονεῖν ἔοικεν. ἀλλ' ἀνοίγετε.

τάχ' ἄν τιν' αἰδῶ κάπ' ἐμοὶ βλέψας λάβοι.

{ΤΕ.} ἰδοῦ, διοίγω· προσβλέπειν δ' ἔξεστί σοι

τὰ τοῦδε πράγῃ, καὐτὸς ὥς ἔχων κυρεῖ. (344-347)

CHORUS: The man seems to be sane, but open up! Perhaps upon
seeing me he will take some shame/dignity/respectability.

TECMESSA: Look, I open it. It is possible for you to look upon his
matters/deeds and how he is doing.

We cannot be sure that cues such as this one necessarily introduced actual use of the *ekkyklema*, but it seems a likely convention.

Evidence for the *mêchanê*, or crane, is more controversial. This device, whose actual construction and capabilities are hotly debated, could lift an actor in the air, presumably above the roof of the *skênê*, though we do not know exactly how high. Some of the strongest evidence for the existence and use of the *mêchanê* comes, again, from Aristophanes' parodies of it in several plays, including *Birds* (Iris' entrance, 1199ff.), *Peace* (Trygaeus flying to heaven on a dung beetle, 80ff.), and *Women at the Thesmophoria* (Euripides flying in as Perseus to rescue his kinsman, 1008ff.). Although Donald J. Mastronarde has argued that the crane "represents a striving for 'realism' in physical movement, a striving that suggests that mere imagination was not always thought to be sufficient for the representation of divine epiphanies or spectacular flight," its evidently frequent parody in comedy suggests that it may never have been "realistic" in anything approaching our modern sense of the term (253). The device may have been quite awkward, and while it could create a spectacular effect in a tragedy, the audience was, most likely, keenly aware of it as an artificial apparatus. The audience's ability to participate in a performance with imagination and ready adaptation to a play's spectatorial demands would then be the key to a device that should inspire awe one day and laughter the next.

We do not know when the crane was first introduced, how it developed, or how often it was used. There are very few scenes that truly demand a flying actor, and when in doubt, a simpler solution for the staging problem, such as placing an actor on the *skênê* roof, should be our preferred option. Even the epiphanies of gods at the ends of plays may not have used the *mêchanê* very often in the fifth century, despite the fact that our term for these scenes, "deus ex machina," assumes this component. As Taplin

notes, “the mechane was conventionally used for these epiphanies [at the ends of plays] in the fourth century, and it soon became proverbial,” but it remains unclear whether many of Euripides’ original productions featured the machinery (Taplin (1977) 444). Since its operation was probably somewhat cumbersome, the *mêchanê* may not have been the most dramatically effective choice in all situations. Taplin suggests that the Euripidean epiphanies that demand immediate intervention, particularly when they lack a speech about the god’s approach, may have simply placed the god on the roof of the skênê, for a sudden appearance (Taplin (1977) 445).

The *ekkyklema* and the *mêchanê* became available for the Greek theater at some point during the fifth century, but their precise usage remains unclear. Regardless of exactly how and when they were used, we can take them as indicators of the kind of performance and spectatorship that the Greek theater featured. Audiences must have been able to understand the theatrical meanings of this machinery and how to use those as tools for their own imagining during the performance. We need not see these as tools of “realism,” and indeed, it would be irresponsible of us to liken such devices to the slick, nearly invisible special effect machinery of a modern Broadway theater. Even if they were abstract, clumsy, and noisy, the *ekkyklema* and *mêchanê* could have been very effective in a theater that sought to engage actively the imaginations of the spectators.

Conclusion

This introduction to the Greek theater has necessarily been very brief, and I have omitted many important aspects of its context, including the details of the festival

context and ritual significance, the elements of competition and judging, and the roles of the choregus and the theoric fund in paying for these events. For more information on these and other topics, I direct the inquiring reader to Csapo and Slater's *Context of Ancient Drama*, which collects many important testimonia in English translation, or to the revised edition of Graham Ley's *A Short Introduction to the Ancient Greek Theater*, which provides a very concise and lucid general introduction to the Greek theater, complete with a very helpful bibliography organized by topic.

The classical Greek tragic theater, as I hope to show, invited its spectators into a strongly imaginative and active participation with the performance. Classicists have sometimes explored this imaginative component of Greek tragedy, but they tend to do so specifically in the context of offstage action: since many important actions, often violent, happen off stage, the audience must be able to imagine them in order to understand the continuing narrative. Nicolaos C. Hourmouziades's *Production and Imagination in Euripides* is representative of this trend: his study of the "area of imagination" includes treatment of the interior space, the off-stage areas, and the off-stage sections of the parodoi or the destinations implied by them. Hourmouziades is interested in the audience's understanding of action that happens off stage, beyond the audience's sight and, thus, outside of the *theatron*. While his study has many interesting ideas and implications for spectators' understanding of offstage action and space,³⁵ however, his study, like those of messenger speeches and offstage violence

³⁵ For example, he explores the problem of how very familiar elements of the Athenian context must become, in some way, places from the world of the play: "...if the space in the theatre did not represent a part of Athens, the outer region had also to undergo a corresponding imaginary transformation, so that the transition from the one

specifically, does not consider the role of spectators' imagination in understanding objects, characters, and actions within the onstage space.

Rather than retreading the well-worn path of messenger speeches and offstage violence, I will investigate here the spectators' imaginative participation with the onstage space. This onstage space did not simply include visible representation of action but also, I propose, cues that stimulated spectators' imaginations, asking them to understand other objects and actions as being present in the onstage space and unfolding in the present time, in opposition to the offstage, past-tense events related in messenger speeches, even if those objects and actions are not literally visible to them.

In Chapter 2, "Objects of Imagination: Props Seen and Unseen on the Greek Tragic Stage," I will consider the roles of props in extant Greek tragedy, using the texts of the plays to help determine which objects implied in the texts might have been physically present, which might have been absent, and which might have been present but either too small for most spectators to see or too abstract to serve as fully iconic representations of the objects. Even the physically absent props, I will argue, can be theatrically real for the performance, with the spectators' active imaginative participation.

Chapter 3, "Staging the Unstageable: Battles, Earthquakes, and Destruction," will take a similar approach, showing how spectators can contribute to the production of theatrically real action in the stage space, even if that action is not physically,

area to the other could be performed without violating the conventional links between what was seen and what was only imagined" (109). Despite the value in his consideration of this transformation, however, his division of "seen" and "imagined" is far too stark, as I hope to show.

visibly represented or is represented only in a very abstract way. I discuss such traditionally problematic examples as the earthquakes in *Heracles* and *Bacchae*, as well as the cataclysm at the end of *Prometheus Bound*, and I propose that understanding “unstageable” action as literally unstaged but theatrically and imaginatively real solves many of the critical conundrums that have troubled scholars for so long.

A foundational issue for both unseen props and unstaged action is the spectators’ perception. What do they see and hear? How do they construct a larger understanding and experience of the action, inflecting what they see and hear with their imaginations? And what does it mean, for a fifth-century Greek, to see or to hear? In Chapter 4, “The Touch of the Spectator: Perception as a Point of Contact,” I address these questions first by exploring the implications of gods on the stage, which I suggest may have been literally seen but imaginatively “unseen,” then by analyzing both tragedies and some philosophical writings on perception in order to uncover some of the meanings and implications of perception for the Greeks. The Greek understanding of perception, and vision in particular, seems to involve some sense of contact between perceiver and perceived, and this concept may inform both the actions of certain tragic characters and the selection of which actions might be appropriate to represent fully on the stage and which might be best left to the imagination.

I conclude with “Seeing in the ‘Seeing-Place,’” a brief study of the spectators of tragedy and philosophical arguments about the effects of theatrical spectatorship. In particular, I discuss Aristotle’s notorious dismissal of “spectacle” in *Poetics* and Plato’s attitudes toward theater and mimetic poetry in *The Republic* and *Ion*, for

which, I argue, his notions about seeing and hearing are important contexts. Finally, I begin to widen the scope to consider the lasting effects of these stage practices, perspectives on perception, and ethical concerns, as they continued to reappear in various ways in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

CHAPTER 2

OBJECTS OF IMAGINATION: PROPS SEEN AND UNSEEN ON THE GREEK TRAGIC STAGE

As compared to set and costumes, theatrical properties are particularly significant pieces of the theatrical *mise-en-scène*, due to actors' direct interactions with them. In his phenomenological study of the theater, Stanton B. Garner explains this unique importance of props: "Even when most sparse—as in the minimalist settings of Beckett's plays or Slawomir Mrozeck's *Tango* (1965)—props constitute privileged nodal points in the scenic field, asserting a powerful materiality and a density both semiotic and phenomenal" (89). These objects attract spectators' attention, and they may serve to connect actor/characters³⁶ with their physical environment, bridging the gap between the live bodies and the distant, (usually) stationary set. Unlike most sets, props travel, and movement is an important element of the live theatrical performance, one that, moreover, does not translate as well to the reading of a written text.

Props may serve a variety of functions in the theater, and in some cases, the idea of the prop may serve that function without a physical object being present. In these cases, verbal cues combine with actors' gestures and spectators' imaginations to

³⁶ I follow Bruce McConachie in his use of the term "actor/character" to designate the unique entity of an actor playing a character. I use this term in contexts in which my discussion should not refer specifically to the actor (the physical person playing a role) or to the character (the imagined person within the diegesis) but to the blended actor/character that exists in the imaginations of the spectators and actors. McConachie explains this phenomenon as "cognitive blending." See especially pages 42-44 of McConachie's *Engaging Audiences* for further discussion.

invoke the reality of that prop, without its visible sign. After proposing a definition of “prop,” I will begin by discussing the various types and functions of props in extant Greek tragedy, then continue to an exploration of which props must have been seen on the stage, which might not have been seen, and why the visual aspect of them may be significant.

The Stage Property: Towards a Definition

If props can be so significant, then, what could be the role of stage properties in the context of a non-illusionistic, pre-modern theater? Specifically, how did they function on the ancient Greek stage? What did they look like? How often and under what circumstances were they used? What purposes did they serve? What is the difference between a prop in a comedy and a prop in a tragedy? What and how do props mean, both to the original spectators and to modern spectators of those plays? Given the recent interest in ancient acting and staging, it is surprising that scholars rarely address these questions about props in any but the most cursory fashion.³⁷ One must wonder why we can all agree on their importance, yet hesitate to study them beyond that simple claim.

³⁷ David Seale, for example, readily acknowledges the importance of props at the beginning of a paragraph in his introduction: “As regards stage properties, many are so crucial to the working of a scene or to the meaning of the whole tragedy, like the great bow in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, that it is difficult to imagine the plays without them” (20). After such a promising statement, however, he merely uses this as an excuse for assuming realism in Greek tragedy – “There is, then, good reason to believe that within the conventional framework there is room for a fair degree of naturalistic performance” – and never returns to props with any substantial attention (20).

Perhaps the scarcity of hard evidence has inhibited close study of objects on the stage, but this lack has not stopped explorations of and speculations about Greek stagecraft in general. Furthermore, in the case of comedy, the visual evidence from vase paintings actually provides more information about props than we have about many other elements of stagecraft, and the images confirm the heavy use of props and suggest ways that they might contribute to the meaning, humor, and physical action of the performance.³⁸ Regrettably, we have no vase paintings that clearly depict a performance of tragedy (they instead reflect the myths behind the plays, or perhaps the scenes as spectators might imaginatively fill them out), so the evidence for tragic props is admittedly rather scant.

Despite the deficiencies of the evidence, the situation is no worse for props than for other issues of staging, and we can at least find some textual evidence for their use, while recognizing the limitations of using the text to reconstruct performance. There are, for example, some moments in which the text clearly indicates the passing of an object from one actor to another,³⁹ and others strongly suggest that an actor is using a prop to accomplish an action that the text and context clearly demand.⁴⁰ Such information about staging must surely be as valuable as that for character entrances and exits, a topic that has attracted a great deal of scholarly

³⁸ For examples of these vase paintings, see especially the plates in Taplin, *Comic Angels: and Other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase-Paintings*.

³⁹ See, for example, the heavily emphatic passing of the bow from Philoctetes to Neoptolemus in *Philoctetes* 762 ff.

⁴⁰ A common example would be the jars that characters use to pour libations, as in Sophocles' *Electra* 634-659.

attention over the years,⁴¹ but in spite of the various attempts to construct a grammar of dramatic techniques for character entrances and exits, none has been made for the movements of stage properties.⁴² A grammar of this sort would provide only a dim glimpse into the full life and meaning of props on the stage, but it would be no less valuable than the similar studies of other elements. At the least, a closer study of a wider variety of examples of props, including their movements and their purposes, should shed some light on the nature of the stage property as an element of Greek stagecraft, and this chapter will begin this work.

While props on the Greek stage have long lacked close attention, this deficiency is just as common in the rest of theater history scholarship. In 2003, Andrew Sofer was able to begin *The Stage Life of Props* with the observation that “A survey confirms that most books that mention stage properties in their title are manuals aimed at the aspiring stage designer or technical director, rather than studies aimed at the actor, director, playwright, or scholar” (v). In 2011, the situation is hardly different. Interest has risen somewhat with the publication of Sofer’s study, and with

⁴¹ See especially Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* and Michael R. Halleran, *Stagecraft in Euripides*. Both of these works seem to understand “stagecraft” primarily as entrances and exits, and in fact, this is Halleran’s explicit purpose: “This study builds on and contributes to the ‘grammar of dramatic technique’ by examining three aspects of it in Euripides: (1) entrances and their announcements; (2) preparation for and surprise in entrances; (3) dramatic connections between exits and entrances and the lyrics that they frame.” (1)

⁴² Joachim Dingel has done a methodical study of tragic props, but his approach is primarily one of identification and catalogue, rather than a study of the props’ movements and stage lives. For his list of examples of props in tragedy, see Dingel, “Requisit und szenisches Bild in der griechischen Tragödie,” in *Die Bauformen der griechischen Tragödie* (1971), 347-367. Dingel’s conclusion is that Aristotle’s assertion that visible things are unnecessary for tragedy is belied by the significance of certain props.

the recent volume of *Theatre Symposium* (Vol. 18, 2010) devoted to the topic, but overall, most studies of props remain either non-existent or purely literary in their approach.

In this literary perspective, critics approach props as literary images or symbols, without attempting to understand their theatrical nature and effect. In the area of Greek tragedy, this has long been the almost-exclusive approach: anyone who studies *Philoctetes* must discuss the symbolism of the bow; the color and richness of the fabric in *Agamemnon* have traditionally been favorite objects of speculation for those who read the play as tracing Agamemnon's *hubris* and fall; and critics as early as the Hellenistic scholiasts have been fascinated by Electra's urn, whether they see it as an opportunity to think about the nature of mimesis when an actor is thought to carry the real ashes of a loved one,⁴³ or whether they use it to apply Freudian psychoanalysis to Sophocles' character.

In her recent study of tragic props, *Tragic Props and Cognitive Function: Aspects of the Function of Images in Thinking*, Colleen Chaston has taken a step away from the overwhelming trend of literary interpretation of props by bringing cognitive research to her approach. Her work is valuable for its appropriation of important cognitive findings for inquiry into Greek tragedy, and particularly for her focus on spectators' processes of perceiving and interpreting what they see on the stage,⁴⁴ but

⁴³ Aulus Gellius (writing ca. 180 BC) tells the story of an actor named Polos who supposedly performed Sophocles' *Electra* using the ashes of his own son in the urn (*Attic Nights* VI.5). For the relevant passage in translation, see Csapo and Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, Part IV, source 62 (p. 264).

⁴⁴ Her initial discussion of the urn in Sophocles' *Electra* is representative of this aspect of her approach: "The urn is an image which connects with the spectators' past

nevertheless this study is greatly deficient in its attention to the materiality and embodiment of live performance.

Despite the word “props” in her title, Chaston is interested not in material props, or even necessarily in objects that are imagined to be on stage if not physically present, but on “mental images.” This focus allows her to broaden her scope to include such objects as the shields in *Seven against Thebes*, which are imagined specifically as being outside the city walls, beyond the area shown on the stage.⁴⁵ As Chaston explains at the beginning of her introduction, “the present study proposes that props represent images, both visually perceived and mental, which may serve a cognitive function in thinking and problem solving” (1). Thus, her approach becomes far too close to the traditional literary one: with such an emphasis on the text as creating the images and no significant distinction between onstage and offstage images or props, one is left to wonder exactly how seeing a live performance would be different from simply reading the text.

Certainly all of these studies do illuminate some aspects of the object, the play, and/or the involved characters, but by collapsing a complex, dynamic theatrical event into a simpler text of words on a page and their meaning to an individual reader, they

associations and invites a perceptual comparison between what a funerary urn symbolizes in real life (namely death) and the purposes to which the image is being put in the play. As the urn accrues its further dramatic symbolism of deceit and revenge the spectators are drawn into perceptual anticipation in the form of hypothesis. The dramatization itself, cued by the image of the urn, offers a simulation of successful revenge through which Athenians can hypothesise about the effectiveness of revenge as a solution” (48-49). Chaston’s attention to this spectatorial process, particularly as the object’s meaning changes, is a valuable contribution to scholarship on Greek tragedy.

⁴⁵ Indeed, she devotes an entire chapter of her three-chapter study to the shields of *Seven against Thebes* 375-676.

limit the larger explorations of how material objects move and mean on the stage in a live performance before an audience. A new, theatrical approach must begin by being open to the project of rematerializing the prop, as Sofer outlines in his preface:

By viewing the prop as an entity rather than as a symbol, tool as well as trope, I aim to make visible precisely what we as text-based critics are trained not to see: the temporal and spatial dimensions of the material prop in performance. I argue that we can parse the ideological ramifications of historical stage objects for their audience only once we have recovered their mobile, material life on the stage. (vii)

We must examine specific props, whether or not they are traditionally popular objects of critical inquiry, with a new focus on their movement, materiality, and theatrical life. This project may even identify some props that might seem insignificant based only on the text of the play but that animate their scenes and add important meaning to the performance when manipulated by live actors on the stage.

The first step for a fresh approach to this theatrical element is to construct a definition of “prop.” For the purposes of this study, I will consider a “prop” to be: *any object on the stage that actors hold, manipulate, use, or pass from one to another; or any such object whose existence and significance are clearly demanded by the play and understood by the audience, and that takes a role in the theatrical life of the performance, even if it is not visible or physically present.* Note, first, that both parts of this explanation of the nature of the stage property are based on the theatrical life of the object, not simply on its function as a sign (the semiotic understanding of its nature), on its effect on spectators (the vital point for phenomenologists), or on its

capacity to symbolize, to foreshadow, or to collect connotations (the favorite focal points for literary critics). Rather, a theatrical approach should allow room for all of these potential functions and meanings of the prop to come together with a focus on its theatricality to create a more holistic understanding of its nature, effect, and significance.

The first part of this definition clearly reflects the simpler and more familiar understanding of “prop,” so I begin here: a prop is any object on the stage that actors hold, manipulate, use, or pass from one to another. This definition necessarily includes costume items that actors put on, take off, or move while on stage, such as veils or wreaths. On occasion, costume pieces to which characters specifically call attention may be noteworthy, though they are not actually props unless the actors manipulate or interact with them in ways other than simply wearing them.⁴⁶ This understanding of “prop” will not generally include large, stationary set pieces such as statues or altars, unless actors specifically interact with them physically. In these distinctions from costume and set pieces, I follow, for the most part, Andrew Sofer, who notes that it is the actor’s manipulation that causes an object to become a prop: “...a stage object must be ‘triggered’ by an actor in order to become a prop (objects shifted by stagehands between scenes do not qualify). Thus a hat or sword remains an article of

⁴⁶ Breaking away from the ancient Greek context for a moment, we may find an excellent example of a prop-like costume in Eugène Labiche’s classic 1851 farce, *An Italian Straw Hat*. Hélène struggles with her wedding dress in Acts I and II, crying out that a pin is sticking into her back (16-17, 28). The dress is her costume, but her interactions with it are more similar to the problems others in the play have with such props as the Italian straw hat and potted palm than to a typical wearing of a costume.

costume until an actor removes or adjusts it, and a chair remains an item of furniture unless an actor shifts its position” (12).⁴⁷

For the application to Greek tragedy, I will be a bit more generous than Sofer in applying the term “prop” to set pieces. Given the sparseness of the Greek tragic stage and the rarity even of “normal” interaction with set pieces, such as sitting on a chair, I will include all set pieces with which actors specifically interact. For example, several plays suggest that altars or statues of gods may be on stage, but only when actors move or interact with these might they enter into the realm of “prop,” as in the case of Oedipus with the statue of Colonus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, or with Helen’s clinging to the tomb of Proteus in *Helen*. Sofer’s definition would probably categorize both the statue and the tomb as set pieces, but in the context of the Greek tragic stage, I would argue that for each, the actor’s interaction with the item is significant and unusual to the point that it should be considered alongside the other props, with which it more closely shares its theatrical role and meaning. Furthermore, objects naturally attract a different kind of attention from perceivers when they are connected with a human and his or her intentionality. Even if the actor/character is using a piece of furniture or a statue for “normal” interaction, that interaction still confers additional importance to the object and transforms it from a piece of background scenery to a

⁴⁷ In his footnote here, Sofer comments, “the distinction is drawn by Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Semiotics of Theater* p. 107” (n. 34). Oliver Taplin uses a similar rationale: “The instances I discuss [of costume pieces as props] are, in fact, mostly distinct items which can be taken off and given special attention—wreaths, armour, veils and so forth” (Taplin (1978) 78). I prefer Sofer’s approach because it requires that pieces actually be taken off or manipulated in ways other than simple wearing, not simply that they have the potential for such use.

piece of action and intentionality, and thus the object becomes, for my purposes here, a prop.⁴⁸

The second part of my proposed definition of “prop” is more difficult: I suggest that a prop could also be any such object whose existence and significance are clearly demanded by the play and understood by the audience, and that takes a role in the theatrical life of the performance, even if it is not physically present. Here, I depart from Sofer’s definition, as well as from most common understandings of “prop.” How can something be a prop if it is not physically on the stage? Certainly physical objects are the most common props, and they are clearly the easiest to understand and study. Nonetheless, if we take a strong theatrical approach, we should include here any objects that are important to the theatrical life of the performance, objects that take an active role in the action of the play and/or in the audience’s experience of it, even if they are not physically present in a particular performance. We can also add here any props that are physically present but are too small for most spectators to see them. A prime example of such props would be recognition tokens: from tragedy to New Comedy and beyond, these objects tend to be very small, such as a lock of hair, a seal,

⁴⁸ Working from a cognitivist perspective in *Engaging Audiences*, Bruce McConachie explains this transformation of meaning that a prop undergoes when an actor interacts with it: “Manipulation, when it occurs, links the prop to the actor/character’s intentionality. The moment of manipulation is a crucial transition for spectatorial vision. At that instant, the audience ceases to look at the potential prop as part of the visual surround and shifts its gaze to generating a visuomotor representation to attempt to understand how the actor is using the prop-in-the-hand to support his or her character’s emotions and intentions” (83). In a section prior to his discussion of props, McConachie synthesizes some research into the mirror neuron system, empathy, and visual perception to show that humans automatically search for human intentionality in what they perceive and that they perceive this differently than other kinds of movement and objects. See especially pages 65-75.

a ring, or tiny childhood tokens.⁴⁹ These objects may not be visible, and so may not even exist physically, yet their roles exist in a very real way that extends beyond the language of the play and into its theatrical life.

In her study of props in Shakespeare, Frances Teague also departs from the traditional definition to include mimed props, and her example demonstrates why it is important to include physically absent but theatrically real objects in a study of props: “Presumably Yorick's skull is a property in *Hamlet* whether it is tangible or not; if the actor wishes to mime picking up a skull, and if the audience is willing to accept that gesture and understand that it signifies an object, then the property exists, if only in the imaginations of the actor and the audience” (16). For the Greek theater, this provision is particularly important because in such a large space, many of the physically present props might have remained unseen, or at least very small and indistinct, for most of the audience, and thus the physical presence of the prop would have been insignificant for that group of spectators, while its role within the performance would presumably have remained meaningful and understood.⁵⁰

I would like to emphasize again that this addition to the definition of prop is still based on a *theatrical* approach to understanding how the stagecraft works. While

⁴⁹ Perhaps taking this trend *ad absurdum*, Plautus' *Rudens* comically highlights that each object in Palaestra's trunk is the teeniest, tiniest trinket (lines 1129-1171). Each item is named with a diminutive form, highlighting the “little-bittiness” of the trinket; see, for example, *cistellam* (“little box,” 1129), *ensiculu[s]* (“little sword,” 1156), and *securicula* (“little axe,” 1158).

⁵⁰ There is one significant *caveat* here: physically absent props are particularly prone to failure. If the audience does not understand the prop and its role, or if it rejects the proposed imaginative move, the prop will not truly fulfill its theatrical role. Should we call such a failed theatrical element a prop? Perhaps not, but particularly in the ancient Greek context, evidence for such exceptions is scarce, so for present purposes, I will put aside this complication.

the addition does allow for intangible or unseen objects to fall under the term “prop,” it is still focused on the project of rematerializing the prop in a theatrical sense. This inclusion does not return us to the literary project of analyzing only (or primarily) language, but rather it allows us to see the material, theatrical role and effect of an object that may not initially seem to be material in itself. I will return to this distinction and explore the possibilities of meaningful but physically absent props later in the chapter. For the present, I will put aside these questions and first discuss the kinds of props found in Greek tragedy, ways of categorizing them, their most significant functions, and some case studies.⁵¹

What Is It, and What Does It Do? Categorizing Props

Based on a theatrically oriented understanding of the stage property, I have compiled a catalogue of these objects in extant Greek tragedy, found here in Appendix I. As a way of beginning to interpret these data and investigate what they might mean for a broader understanding of the role of props in Greek stagecraft, we can consider the common themes that arise in this catalogue and how we might use those themes to categorize the examples of props and their uses. As that last phrase, “examples of props and their uses,” suggests, there are two primary approaches to this task, yielding two distinct schemata for categorization.

⁵¹ To clarify, some of the props I am including in the following discussion may not be physically present on the stage, but the text and/or context of the play calls for them, and for the present, I am not distinguishing between physically present and absent objects to fill these roles.

The first approach is the simplest way to classify an object: to identify what it *is*. This is a descriptive approach that categorizes a prop based on the type of object it is or represents. For example, the water jar that Electra carries in Euripides' *Electra* could be classified most specifically as a water jar or more generally as a vessel, a household item, or a handheld object. The basic identity of the object and its physical or material essence are important for any theatrical approach, since the object's shape, weight, and other material features can affect the spectators' understanding of and affective response to the object. To this primary identification, one could add associations that relate to the object's identity, and these connotative functions of objects tend to be particularly valuable for those engaged in literary analysis. The water jar, for example, might be described as feminine, earthly (as opposed to supernatural), or domestic. It might also carry connotations related to class and station in life, as Electra herself suggests.⁵²

Building from the catalogue in Appendix I, then, the props in Greek tragedy can fall into the following major categories when sorted by the specific types of objects that they are: weapons, clothing pieces, jars/urns, branches/wreaths/garlands, mats/litters/biers, bonds/ropes, torches, and tablets. Corpses could make up one of the largest groups, if we accept that dummies that actors can embrace, adorn, and move

⁵² See, for example, Electra's side comment in reference to her water jar: "τόδ' ἄγος τῶδ' ἐφεδρεῦον κάρα / φέρουσα ... / οὐ δὴ τι χρείας ἐς τοσόνδ' ἀφιγμένη, / ἀλλ' ὥς ὕβριν δείξωμεν Αἰγίσθου θεοῖς" (55-58). [...carrying this pitcher resting on my head ... not, indeed, having come to such a point of necessity, but so that I might show the hubris/insolence of Aegisthus to the gods..."]

around onstage are, in essence, props.⁵³ More general categories would include household items, magical objects, and religious objects (including offerings, thyrsos, small statues of gods, and garlands). A more superficial classification could also divide items by size, ranging from small trinkets that probably would not be seen from the audience (and thus might not be onstage at all), to handheld items that actors manipulate, to large, stationary or mostly stationary, set pieces. For a detailed classification of the props found in the Catalogue of Props in Greek Tragedy, see the first section (“Props Organized by What They *Are*”) of Appendix II, “Categories of Props in Greek Tragedy.”

Based on the natures of the objects that props represent, there could also be a wide range of indirect associations and connotations attached to those props, and those could have a strong effect on their meaning, especially for the original spectators. Here, generalizations may be less useful, as any individual prop will accrue many different meanings and associations through its use and descriptions in its play. Nevertheless, the catalogue of props does suggest some particular trends, including some associations that make contrasting pairs. A prop could be masculine or feminine, earthly or supernatural, light or dark, Greek or barbarian. It could belong to the world of the home or of war, to the temple or oracle, to mourning or death. It could also

⁵³ Andrew Sofer makes this argument and considers its implications in “‘Take up the Bodies’: Shakespeare’s Body Parts, Babies, and Corpses,” in Volume 18 of *Theatre Symposium* (p. 135-148). Since most deaths in Greek tragedy occur offstage, the corpses are generally played by dummies, rather than by live actors, so the case for considering the corpse to be a prop is even clearer than in Sofer’s Shakespearean context. Continuing the distinctions from costumes and set pieces, however, I will consider corpses to be props only when actors interact with them, as when they cover or uncover the body, for example.

indicate such things as good or bad fortune or could belong to the city or the country/farmland. There can be no firm list or limit of associations of this kind, but most of the props found in tragedy carry at least one of the specific associations I have identified, though these may be complex and even interact with each other in conflicting ways.⁵⁴

Let us take a relatively straightforward example as a way of thinking through this particular approach of classifying a prop. The sword of Hector in *Ajax* is a particularly important and symbolic prop: Hector gave it to Ajax when they exchanged gifts after the gods insisted that they end their man-to-man combat in a truce, and now Ajax kills himself by falling on that sword. Clearly, we can identify this prop as a weapon, specifically a sword. As such, it is from the world of warfare and, for an Athenian audience, carries masculine associations. Further, its mythological backstory identifies it as barbarian (and thus significantly out of place in the Greek camp), antagonistic, and even associated with death, as Achilles had used the girdle that Ajax gave Hector in the exchange to drag Hector around the city after his death. Thus some associations adhere to a prop based simply on the nature of the object it represents (i.e. swordness), while others develop for the spectators as they perceive the particular uses, descriptions, and histories of the object as it is represented in the play.

When presented with a collection of objects, most would find this categorization by what they are (physical qualities, familiar item types, etc.) to be the most instinctive approach. However, we can also approach such a collection of

⁵⁴ See the final section of Appendix II for a longer list of the common associations I have identified for props in Greek tragedy.

objects by identifying what they *do*, and this tactic seems particularly useful in a theatrical context, where most objects are present for at least one very specific reason. There are a number of ways to look at the functions of props, beginning with the different aspects of a performance to which a prop's function or purpose could relate. In some cases, we might best describe a prop's function as primarily theatrical, creating a certain kind of moment, interaction, or spectacle on the stage, while in others, the function may seem to be more dramatic, relating to the diegesis and characters' actions. These two functions clearly overlap in most cases, and our own perspective may determine which we see as dominant, but nevertheless, identifying a prop's primary function(s) should be crucial for understanding its theatrical life.

One of the most important and, as Appendix II clearly shows, common functions of a prop is to identify a character. This may be an identification of the specific person (as a club and lion skin identify Heracles), or it may be an identification of a type of character or a role a character is playing (as a garland might indicate a priestess or show that a character is acting as a suppliant). This is a very important theatrical function of a prop: a reader of the play (a modern reader, at least) has plenty of signals in the text to identify characters, from the list of *dramatis personae* to the individual speaker notations, but a spectator of the play needs the visual elements of the performance for an efficient and successful identification of a character. The mask, costume, and props all contribute to this process, and in some cases, a closer consideration of these elements can emphasize roles and other aspects of characters that readers might overlook. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, for example, a reader might gloss over Creon's appearance as a victorious, returning suppliant of the Oracle

of Delphi, but for a spectator, his crown of laurel is a strong visual indicator of this role and keeps the information in a position of some prominence throughout the scene.⁵⁵ A further, common example of this function would be the costumes and props for foreign characters, who almost always speak correct, tragic Attic Greek and might not otherwise be easily identified as foreign.⁵⁶ The impact of such visual and material elements is thus very significant for any theatrical study that values performance and the spectatorial experience, and it confirms that on some level and in some moments, objects do have important semiotic functions independent of language.

In the context of the tragic Greek theater, many props function in the context of religious rituals. Not only do some objects identify characters as suppliants, priests, or similar figures, but others allow characters to perform rituals or parts of rituals on stage. In fact, by my count in Appendix II, this is the second-largest category of prop function, when items used for making offerings or sacrifices, worshipping, granting sanctuary, and performing funerary rites are totaled. For example, Clytemnestra makes offerings to Apollo on stage in Sophocles' *Electra* (634 ff.), and Electra pours libations on her father's tomb in *Libation Bearers* (124-51). In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Iocasta brings garlands and incense to the statue or temple of Apollo to pray for help (911-13). *Ajax*, *Trojan Women*, and *Alcestis*, among others, include scenes in which characters honor and adorn the dead bodies of loved ones with such objects as locks of

⁵⁵ The Priest calls attention to this crown when he describes Creon's approach: "ἀλλ' εἰκάσαι μέν, ἡδύς· οὐ γὰρ ἂν κάρα / πολυστεφής ᾧδ' εἶρπε παγκάρπου δάφνης" (82-83). [As one can guess, [he brings] pleasant news: for his head would not come all crowned with wreaths of berried laurel.]

⁵⁶ There are a few exceptions to this rule. The Chorus of Egyptians in Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* and the Phrygian Slave in Euripides' *Orestes* both seem to speak in broken Greek that emphasizes their barbarian status.

hair and fine fabrics. If these props are bound together by their function of allowing characters to perform rituals, or occasionally gods to grant sanctuary, what exactly is the nature of those rituals and sacred phenomena in the context of the stage? How do the objects perform such a function, and what is the result?

While ritual has long been a popular topic in scholarship of Greek tragedy, most research has either focused on the possible origins of theater in ritual or attempted to derive information about ritual practice from its representations in drama. Both of these topics, however, should point us toward another question: what is the status of the rituals performed in the context of tragedies? A more focused study of the role of stage properties in staged ritual could be one way of approaching an exploration of the significance of such ritual and the complex knot of theatricality and reality involved.

How does the degree of “realness” of the prop itself affect the degree of “realness” of the ritual? Further, if the props are real objects normally used for “authentic” rituals performed in non-theatrical contexts, the nature of the performance as a whole becomes more complicated. Stanton B. Garner’s concern about naturalistic props on the modern stage becomes relevant even to this very different, non-illusionistic theater:

When a cast-iron pot is ‘played’ by a cast-iron pot, imported from actual use, the transparency of fictional semiosis is pressured by a material opacity, and the stage announces itself as a territory of surfaces, dense, particularized, sensory, radically actual. As

verisimilitude increases, in other words, it risks disrupting the very illusion it was imported to serve... (92)

If actors use objects that are normally used for authentic rituals in a non-theatrical context, how do those objects shift the meaning both of that performed ritual and of the remainder of the theatrical performance? Conversely, if the objects are obviously other objects standing in for the authentic objects, how should the audience understand the performance? Has the ritual actually occurred? If not, does the theatrical play elevate or diminish the ritual's status?

As Louise Bruit Zaidman and Pauline Schmitt Pantel explain in their survey, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City*, ancient Greek religion involved a very different understanding of the sacred and the profane than do the major religions familiar to a 21st-century audience. The line between sacred and profane was not a firm, inherent distinction:

Thus *ta hiera* designated the cults and sanctuaries of the gods, but also sacrificial victims. The latter, in other words, were objects endowed by ritual with qualities that brought them into relation with the divine and thus caused them to enter the domain we label 'sacred'. These acts, these places, these objects were endowed with a power that rendered them conducive or favourable to the efficacy of the ritual. However, nothing in their intrinsic nature distinguished them from objects of everyday use, either the implements that were employed in sacrificial cooking...or the food...that was transformed into sacred offerings by being deposited in consecrated places. (8)

For the Greeks, then, objects could *become* sacred through their use in a ritual or through presentation at a temple or altar. Before that ritual or offering, those objects are no different from any other objects.

This understanding of the sacred has important implications for the nature of ritual in tragic performance. If the actors use actual garlands, jars, libations, or other offerings, there is no definitive reason why those objects could not be understood as becoming sacred and performing an authentic ritual. This possibility lies in contrast to the complex issues that adhere to the Christian Eucharist in performance, for example. The Eucharistic wafer becomes consecrated only under certain conditions, and in the Catholic understanding, it actually becomes the body of Christ through the proper administration of the sacrament. As Andrew Sofer has discussed, this understanding then poses a profound challenge for medieval plays that focus on reinforcing this doctrine and the authentic presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Is the wafer in a play such as the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* played by an actual consecrated wafer, or does an unconsecrated wafer stand in for it? Either possibility drastically alters the meaning of the stage action, particularly for an audience that accepts the orthodox understanding of the Eucharist.⁵⁷

In the Greek context, by contrast, a libation of milk and honey that a character pours as an offering is in itself no different from any other mixture of milk and honey until the moment that someone pours it out as an offering. Further, the rituals in Greek tragedy are private ones, performed by individuals, as opposed to public rituals for

⁵⁷ For more on the Eucharist in medieval plays, see Sofer's Chapter 2, "Playing Host: The Prop as Temporal Contract on the Medieval Stage," p. 31-60.

which a priest might be required.⁵⁸ There is no definitive reason why an actor with an object appropriate for an offering, such as fruit or a libation, could not authentically perform that ritual on the stage. Thus, the pivotal question for these staged rituals then becomes not “Is this the right kind of item?” but “Is this item physically present?” For example, when Electra pours a libation on her father’s tomb at the beginning of *Libation Bearers*, it would be reasonable to assume that the actor does hold a real jar of some sort, since this object is central to the scene, but is there a real libation inside that the actor can pour out? Further, if the context, such as a temple, altar, or tomb, is particularly important for transforming an everyday object into a sacred offering or ritual implement, is the stage setting sufficient for stimulating that transformation?

Unfortunately, we do not have enough evidence to determine exactly how these rituals were performed on the stage or how the audience understood them. We cannot know with any certainty whether the Greeks considered these staged rituals to be authentic, sacred rituals in a proper relationship to the gods, but further exploration of the nature of the objects themselves should be fruitful for elaborating the implications of the possible stagings. Such a study should be particularly valuable

⁵⁸ One interesting complication of this would be the fact that the performance of the play is a public event, even though the ritual within the play may be a private one within that imagined world. However, because the ritual itself is not specifically framed as being on behalf of the general public, I do not think that this would invalidate the possibility that an actor (i.e. a private citizen) could be capable of performing the ritual. A more difficult question would be on whose behalf these rituals would be, if they are understood to have meaning and potency beyond the world of the play. Most of these offerings or other rituals are performed on behalf of a particular character within the diegesis, and it would be difficult to determine what the precise purpose would be if the rituals were to have meaning on an extra-diegetic level. We might say that they simply take their place alongside the many other rituals of the larger festival context, but a more specific answer to this question could be very rewarding, though difficult to determine.

given that much research on Greek religion has used tragedy as one of the major sources for reconstructing ritual practices, and we must be very critically aware of the complexities that arise as a result of the theatrical context.

Returning to a delineation of some of the most common functions of props in Greek tragedy, one distinctly theatrical function of these props is to create a particular kind of action or scene. On a dramaturgical level, this could involve a prop that instigates a recognition scene, for example. Or, if we think in terms of simple physical actions, a prop could allow an actor to do a particular action, such as to carry another person by means of a litter. Props often fulfill such practical, physical functions in the theater: Ion uses a broom to sweep in *Ion*, Hector's shield bears the body of Astyanax in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, and the urns and voting pieces allow Athena to conduct a vote to decide Orestes' trial in *Eumenides*. The most common examples of props serving practical, physical functions in extant Greek tragedy include jars that hold offerings (and thus serve a ritual function as well) and litters, mats, biers, and similar objects used to carry the dead or dying.

Unlike the modern theater with its affinity for naturalistic stage business, however, Greek tragedy demands very few props whose *only* purpose is to serve such practical functions: in most cases, these props tend to carry further significance beyond that simple function. On a practical level, something flat and of an appropriate size and strength should be used to carry in a dead body. The specific use of Hector's shield to serve this function for his son Astyanax clearly brings symbolic and affective resonances to that object and the scene. The purpose of such props then extends from practical functions to include symbolic functions: it is not enough for the object to

facilitate an action, but now it must also be seen and understood by the audience in its own right. Such symbolic functions of props have generally received more attention than their other functions, as they tend to be powerful for readers as well as for spectators of live performances. Much traditional dramatic criticism recognizes the poetic qualities of the symbolic aspects of props and other theatrical elements, and for a theatrical perspective on this function, we must simply remember the additional power that comes from the visual nature and the movement of the real prop, rather than simply from the language or the idea of the object.

To return to the possibility of props serving dramaturgical functions, there are some plot points and dramatic scene-types that require objects. Many scenes involving fights or stand-offs, for example, demand appropriate weapons, and indeed, props commonly function to show aggression, enact a confrontation, or create a stand-off in Greek tragedies, though an actual physical struggle is rare. In some cases, props may also be used to kill, or attempt to kill, another character, which also, dramaturgically, can create a death scene. Many props could be understood as creating particular kinds of dramatic scenes or theatrical actions, but there are two possibilities that carry especially significant theatrical weight.

The recognition scene may be the prop scene *par excellence*: two people who have long been lost to each other are finally reunited and come to recognize each other's true identity and relationship, often by means of one or more significant objects. While the recognition scene truly came into its own in New Comedy, where tokens often reveal slave girls to be freeborn daughters of respectable citizens, its roots began at least as early as Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, in which Electra gradually

recognizes her long-lost brother. Although Orestes guesses his sister's identity when he first sees the group of women bringing offerings to the tomb (16), Electra's recognition of him is driven by tokens. She sees a lock of hair on her father's tomb and wonders who might have left such an offering, then declares that it resembles her own hair (176). The Chorus takes her suggestion and asks, "Is this then a secret gift from Orestes?" (177). As Electra's hope grows, she sees footprints near the tomb and compares them to her own, concluding that they match perfectly. Orestes then reveals himself, but when Electra is reluctant to believe that he truly is her brother, he produces a piece of weaving as confirmation:

ἰδοῦ δ' ὕφασμα τοῦτο, σῆς ἔργον χερός,
σπάθης τε πληγὰς ἡδὲ θήρειον γραφὴν. (231-232)

[And look at this weaving, work of your own hand, and the strikes of
the loom blade, and a picture of a beast.]

It is this final token that at last gives Electra confidence in her brother's identity and creates the scene of recognition and joyous reunion.

These three recognition tokens must have been memorable, as Euripides famously parodied them in his own *Electra*. They might certainly raise a number of questions of plausibility, from Euripides' jokes about the natural difference in the size of a man's and a woman's footprints, siblings or no, to the question of how Orestes can recognize his sister at first sight, though he was sent away as a baby, while Electra needs three tokens to recognize him. Indeed, perhaps the intrusion of so many objects lends a comic quality to Aeschylus' original scene as well, since most tragedies are sparing with props, and even a token-driven recognition scene surely need not have

three different tokens.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, we might conclude simply that Aeschylus' scene, overdetermined by props as it might be, makes good theater. Each new item is described in loving detail for spectators who might not be able to see the objects themselves, and each becomes a focal point for a few moments before another takes its place. The three build upon each other, forming dramatic steps to a scene of joyous release, before the play moves again to a building of tension, as the brother and sister begin planning the murders of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Although such scenes might be more common to the later New Comedy, *Libation Bearers* represents an early usage of props functioning to bring about a recognition scene, and tragedy yields similar examples in Sophocles' *Electra*, Euripides' *Ion*, and Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*.

A Special Case: Props as Points of Contact

Recognition tokens may drive their scenes on both dramaturgical and theatrical levels, but another example of props that create particular scenes or moments reveals even more strongly the possible significance and theatricality of props in Greek tragedy. I would like to term this category the "contact-point" props. Such an object becomes a physical contact point between actor/characters, a particularly striking theatrical device given that direct physical contact between speaking actor/characters

⁵⁹ For more on the potential comic quality of props in the context of Greek drama, see my article "Helen's Theatrical *Méchané*: Props and Costumes in Euripides' *Helen*," in Volume 18 of *Theatre Symposium* (2010). A comparison to other recognitions in tragedy may further support this claim. *Ion*, which has much in common with later New Comedy, features a token-based recognition scene. *Oedipus Tyrannus*, however, likewise centers on a recognition of parentage, but this recognition progresses primarily through the verbal testimony of witnesses, not through objects.

(i.e. not mute extras) seems to be quite rare in Greek tragedy. In this use of props, two actors might, for example, touch a prop at the same time; one might hand a prop to the other or use a prop to touch the other; one might touch a prop or costume piece that another is wearing; or one might physically reject another's offered contact by pushing away an object.

Why might such moments be particularly significant, climactic, and theatrically vital? On a simple level, any use of props in Greek tragedy would likely have drawn some degree of extra attention, due merely to the relative scarcity of props in tragedy. The Catalogue of Props in Appendix I supports this point: while there are a few prop-heavy plays (*Bacchae* and the *Electra* plays in particular stand out), most of the tragedies require no more than five objects that we could definitively identify as props, and some could easily be performed with no props at all, other than perhaps a few corpses. These data confirm Oliver Taplin's simple, intuitive point about the significance of props: "As with all stage business the Greek tragedians are sparing in their use of stage-properties, but this very economy throws more emphasis on their employment" (Taplin (1978) 77). Simply put, if there are only, let us say, three props in a performance, those objects should strongly attract the spectators' attention and interest, by nature of their scarcity and visible distinction.

Furthermore, as material parts of the imagined environment, props allow characters to interact with that environment, a particularly important function on a mostly bare stage, such as that of Greek tragedy. Stanton B. Garner describes this function itself as forging a type of contact: "Props establish points of contact between actor/character and *mise-en-scène*; they localize dramatic activity and materialize it in

scenic terms. By extending and physicalizing the body's operation on its material environment, props situate the body more firmly within it" (Garner 89). In most cases, actors can pick up, move, and otherwise manipulate props, and such actions should help spectators anchor the imagined characters in their imagined world. These actions build concrete, material connections among the various elements of the theatrical and dramatic world. Props, then, can serve as points of contact between actor/characters and the physical world that the actors and spectators imaginatively create on the stage, and a similar type of connection should form when an object moves between actors.

Of course, neither the scarcity of props on the tragic stage nor their nature as connections between character and environment goes far towards explaining why inter-character contact-point props in particular would be unusually compelling and significant, as compared to any other props. Rather, it is the nature, use, and (again) relative rarity of physical contact between actor/characters on the Greek tragic stage that would lend a strong sense of significance, and possibly emotion or suspense in some cases, to scenes in which an object brings two characters together, almost, but not quite, to the point of direct physical contact.

As Maarit Kaimio explains in the introduction to her study, *Physical Contact in Greek Tragedy*, the very large acting space of the Greek theater suggests that:

It is unlikely that the author-director would have positioned his actors very close together in this space; on the contrary, they were probably usually a good distance from each other, even when discussing together, so that they should be clearly visible by the large audience, that the large space could be filled up, and that it could clearly be seen

which of the masked characters was speaking. Thus, from the point of view of the use of theatrical space, it is probable that scenes involving physical contact were rather an exception from the usual way of acting and that they consequently had great potential theatrical effect. (9)

Kaimio's conjectures about staging seem reasonable, though we certainly cannot prove them conclusively. We can, however, examine the texts for scenes in which the action and context necessitate physical contact, or at least make it extremely probable, and this is what Kaimio has done in her study.

While admitting that the relation between text and actual staging is problematic and that there is no simple way to extract the staging from the text, Kaimio proceeds to search the texts for probabilities and patterns in their indications for physical contact. As she explains, "In whatever manner the text was staged in performance, either in the fifth century or later, the words referring to physical contact are there in the text and deserve our attention; even if we consider them merely as a part of the literary text and not as part of dramatic deixis, they fall into certain patterns and reveal certain conventions that affect the way we read the text" (8-9). The result of her approach is a breakdown of physical contact in tragedy into categories describing the type of contact, with a brief discussion of all of the examples she has found for each category or sub-category. Kaimio is interested here primarily in moments that seem to indicate physical contact between actor/characters (i.e. excluding contact between an actor and

mute extras⁶⁰), which are ultimately quite rare, though they seem to have increased in frequency later in the fifth and into the fourth centuries (Kaimio 9-10).

The examples of this type of physical contact break down rather neatly into Kaimio's major categories: support and nursing (e.g. guiding an old or blind person, nursing a sick or dying person), clasping hands, embraces, supplication, and violence. Throughout her discussion, Kaimio notes examples that could involve physical contact between actor/characters but do not, such as when mutes support the old or blind (12-14) or when a character supplicates another verbally but does not seem to complete the ritual with physical contact (49-50, 55-56). Such moments, some of which may even be common enough to be conventional, may then serve to heighten further the significance, poignancy, or tension when an action does culminate in physical contact, as, for example, when Antigone (rather than a mute attendant) leads her blind father Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and Euripides' *Phoenician Women*. Ultimately, Kaimio's extensive survey confirms that, while physical contact may have been more common on the Greek tragic stage than we know, there are relatively few examples in the extant plays themselves for which the text provides strong evidence for staging as physical contact.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Contact between an actor and mute extras is much more common, particularly in the cases of supporting contact (mutes supporting an old, blind, or otherwise weak actor) and violent contact (mutes arresting an actor or escorting an already-bound actor). Kaimio discusses these briefly but is more interested in the examples of contact that break with these conventions by giving the supportive or violent role to a speaking character, thus increasing the significance of the contact and the scene. (See especially Kaimio 12-13.)

⁶¹ Kaimio does not include any numerical totals, since her interest is not in determining the exact number of examples but rather in deciphering trends and conventions. By my count, she catalogues approximately 77 examples (from the body

We can conclude, then, that direct physical contact between actor/characters in Greek tragedy should generally heighten tensions and emotions or carry other important meanings. Moments of contact, even simple, everyday gestures such as an embrace or a handshake, can become very significant moments in this theater. It follows, then, that a moment in which a prop acts as a point of connection between two actors would be similarly significant, possibly even with an added tension from actor/characters being very close but not yet touching.

As a fairly simple and typical example, in Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, the tablet⁶² on which Iphigenia has written a note to be taken to her family at home may seem insignificant. After all, Iphigenia recites all of the pertinent information aloud, in case her messenger Pylades should lose the physical tablet on the way back to Greece. From a literary perspective, it is her words and not the tablet itself that bring about the recognition between Iphigenia and her brother Orestes, but from a theatrical perspective, the physical tablet provides a material point of contact among the three Greeks throughout the scene. Although the text gives no specific indication for when it happens, Iphigenia seems to pass the tablet to Pylades at some point after her entrance, during her negotiation with Orestes and Pylades.⁶³ Tensions

of 33 mostly complete plays, plus a few of the major fragments) in which physical contact between actors is very likely, but this number is very rough, as she sometimes discusses unclear examples and leaves them open to either possibility.

⁶² Iphigenia brings the tablet when she reenters at line 725 and indicates it at lines 727-728: "Here, strangers, are the folds with many leaves in the shape of a letter."

⁶³ I think the most likely possibilities would be either lines 735-736, where Iphigenia asks that Pylades give an oath that he will deliver this tablet, or just after the oath, perhaps around line 752. Pylades certainly has it before he gives it to Orestes at lines 791-792, and it would be most natural and most dramatically powerful if he has it during Iphigenia's recitation of its contents.

and emotions grow as Iphigenia then tells Pylades what the letter says, with the men gradually coming to recognize Iphigenia as Orestes' sister, and as soon as she finishes her message, Pylades announces that he will discharge his duty and give the tablet to Orestes at once:

ἰδοῦ, φέρω σοι δέλτον ἀποδίδωμί τε,

Ὀρέστα, τῆσδε σῆς κασιγνήτης πάρα. (791-792)

[Here, I bring a letter to you and deliver it, Orestes, from your sister here.]

Orestes accepts it (“δέχομαι,” 793), says he will not bother to open and read it, and proceeds to try to bring Iphigenia to recognize him in return.

After Iphigenia realizes that this Greek man is indeed her brother, the two embrace (829 ff.), and it is unclear what might happen to the tablet. Perhaps Orestes passes it back to Pylades, or perhaps they embrace with the letter between them. They might simply cast it aside, but from a practical standpoint, it is generally inconvenient to leave props lying around on the stage, where an actor might easily trip over them. More likely, one of them, probably Pylades or Orestes, continues to hold the tablet until they exit at line 1088 to begin their escape plan.

Regardless of where it is after the recognition, the tablet serves an important role in the emotional life of the scene before the relationship is confirmed. It is a recognition token to some extent, but because Iphigenia recites her message and story, the physical letter is not necessary to create the recognition. Certainly Euripides could have written the scene such that Iphigenia gives her message only verbally, so we should assume, I would argue, that the object itself has some further significance

dependent on its being an actual letter. That significance may well be due to its use in forming a point of contact: first, whenever Iphigenia hands it to Pylades, the tablet forms a physical, visual link between her and one of the Greek strangers. Her gesture of handing over the letter helps to seal their bargain and show their trust of each other, bringing these three Greeks just a little closer together. Visually, it may also look like a handclasp, a powerful gesture of agreement and solemn promise. Further, the spectators know that the men are actually her brother and his companion, and this link can be an early step in the building of tension and anticipation for the recognition. When Pylades delivers the letter to Orestes, it then provides a connection between brother and sister, as Orestes holds what he now knows to be a letter written by his long-lost sister. He can touch, even embrace, this letter that she herself has written and held, long before Iphigenia recognizes him and allows him to embrace her. The tablet that might be unnecessary for a reader of the play could, in performance, become a locus of spectators' attention, anticipation, and emotion, as they watch the brother and sister slowly approach recognition.

A more complex and significant example of the power of a contact-point prop comes in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. On the level of staging, the tensions and movements of this play truly emerge through physicality, from the extreme isolation of Philoctetes to the several moments of contact between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, to Philoctetes' seizure at the hands of Odysseus' men, to Neoptolemus' staying hand that prevents Philoctetes from killing his enemy.

The theme of significant physicality, whether contact or lack thereof, naturally stems from Philoctetes' total isolation on the island of Lemnos, which is both part of

the familiar mythological back-story and a state emphasized in the opening of the play, through Odysseus' account of the abandonment and through Odysseus' and Neoptolemus' exploration of the man's empty, makeshift home. They point out a bed of leaves, a poorly made wooden cup, stones for starting fires, and rags drying outside,⁶⁴ all of which supplement the picture of Philoctetes' lonely life and lack of anything beyond the barest and most basic of necessities, thus providing details that should stimulate spectators' imaginations (33-39). This opening scene highlights Philoctetes' isolation from any other human beings and his total separation from society and civilization, thus preparing spectators to see other characters' contact with, or, when it can be determined, proximity to Philoctetes as significant.

Philoctetes' exclamation upon first seeing Neoptolemus and his sailors (the Chorus) emphasizes his isolation and the usual responses of the few people he does meet on his island. He calls out to the strangers, asks who they are and where they are from, and then pleads:

... καὶ μή μ' ὄκνω
δείσαντες ἐκπλαγῆτ' ἀπηγριωμένον,
ἀλλ' οἰκτίσαντες ἄνδρα δύστηνον, μόνον,
ἐρῆμον ὧδε κᾶφίλον κακούμενον
φωνήσατ', εἴπερ ὥς φίλοι προσήκετε.

230 ἀλλ' ἀνταμείψασθ' (225-230)

⁶⁴ These items may not actually be on stage or visible to the audience. The inside of the cave does not need to be visible and probably is not, since characters can exit into the cave. The rags hanging outside could have been on the stage to set the scene, but no one specifically interacts with them, so they could be invoked only in words.

[And don't shrink back with hesitation, fearing me who has become wild, but having pity on this wretched man, alone, desolate, and thus afflicted, friendless, speak, if you come as friends. But answer!]

For Philoctetes, with his wild appearance and putrid smell, there is a great risk that these newcomers might draw back or even leave in revulsion, without speaking to him at all, and his repetition of pleas for the strangers to speak (“φωνήσατ’,”

“ἀνταμείψασθ’”)⁶⁵ emphasize these fears. Neoptolemus remains, but he most likely maintains some distance from Philoctetes, not only for practical reasons of staging, such as those Kaimio identifies as related to the size of the stage, but also for dramatic reasons. Philoctetes, as desperate as he is to talk to another human being and to find a way to get home, is very conscious of his repulsive appearance and smell and would not be likely to approach Neoptolemus too closely, for fear of turning him away.

When he begs the young man to bring him home, he acknowledges that he will be an unpleasant companion on the ship but suggests that he could travel in the hold,⁶⁶ on the prow, on the stern, or anywhere else out of the way (481-483). It seems that others withdraw from Philoctetes, and he accordingly withdraws from others in order to minimize his repulsiveness and beg for the help he needs.

⁶⁵ Some editors read “καλούμενον” [call out!] instead of “κακούμενον” [afflicted] in line 228 and if this reading is correct, Philoctetes would have an additional imperative asking the strangers to speak.

⁶⁶ “ἐς ἀντλίαν”: “ἀντλία” may mean “the hold of a ship” or “bilge-water,” the latter of which may better convey the sense of alienation and the lowliness of the accommodation that Philoctetes is willing to endure. (See Liddell and Scott’s entry for “ἀντλία.” “Hold of a ship” is the first definition, and the second is “bilge-water, filth.”)

The staging of the first part of the play, then, is most likely marked by Philoctetes' physical distance from Neoptolemus and the Chorus, while Neoptolemus' willingness to remain and talk with Philoctetes, then to take him onto the ship, gives the wretched man some hope of escaping from his isolation. There is one moment that could involve physical contact but most likely does not: Philoctetes' supplication of Neoptolemus. As he begins to beg for passage back to Greece, Philoctetes cries out:

πρός νύν σε πατρός, πρὸς τε μητρός, ὦ τέκνον,

πρὸς τ' εἴ τί σοι κατ' οἶκόν ἐστι προσφιλές,

470 ἱκέτης ἰκνοῦμαι, μὴ λήπης μ' οὕτω μόνον... (468-470)

[Now by your father, and by your mother, o son, and by whatever at

home that is dear to you, I beg you as a suppliant, don't leave me thus

alone!]

Later in his plea, he says that he is falling on his knees before Neoptolemus,

“προσπίτνω σε γόνασι,” one of the physical components of full, ritual supplication

(485). He does not, however, make any reference to any of the other physical elements

of supplication, the touching of the knees, hands, and chin of the other person.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ See John Gould, “*Hiketeia*,” for an explanation of the components of ritual supplication. See especially his analysis of Thetis' supplication of Zeus in Book I of the *Iliad* on p. 76: “The significant elements in this sequence of actions are those of lowering the body and crouching (sitting or kneeling), of physical contact with knees and chin, and of kissing. ...supplication in some sense can be said to take place without any of them, but together they constitute the ritual act in its ‘complete’ or strongest form.” Other examples also involve the hands. For a more recent study involving a variety of sources, see F. S. Naiden, *Ancient Supplication*. In his discussion of gestures (p. 44-62), Naiden suggests that contact is particularly effective for demanding a response from the person supplicated but that prostration and raising the hands are common when the suppliant is too far away from the supplicandus (see especially p. 51).

Maarit Kaimio suggests that his lameness prevents Philoctetes from completing the ritual with physical contact, but it is just as likely that he maintains distance in order to show how little of an imposition he will make himself on the voyage (Kaimio 54-55). Regardless of the motivation, Philoctetes most likely does not touch Neoptolemus here, and the two Greeks probably remain somewhat separated on the stage.

Given Philoctetes' extreme isolation, the first moment of physical contact between him and another human should naturally be climactic. Significantly, the first contact actually comes through the medium of his bow. Philoctetes has most likely been holding his bow since his entrance, and Neoptolemus first calls attention to it at line 654:

{NE.} ἦ ταῦτα γὰρ τὰ κλεινὰ τόξ' ἃ νῦν ἔχεις;

{ΦΙ.} ταῦτ', οὐ γὰρ ἄλλ' ἔστ', ἀλλ' ἃ βαστάζω χεροῖν.

(654-655)

[Ne. Is this indeed the famous bow that you're holding now?

Phi. This, for there is no other, but the one that I am carrying in my hands.]

The spectators have probably been able to see the bow since Philoctetes' entrance, which would also facilitate a quick, visual identification of the character, but now, as Neoptolemus continues with a wish to look closely at it, their attention should focus on the object:

ἄρ' ἔστιν ὥστε καγγύθεν θεῶν λαβεῖν,

καὶ βαστάσαι με προσκύσαι θ' ὥσπερ θεόν; (656-657)

[Would it be possible for me to take a look from close at hand, and to kiss it and reverence it as if it were a god?]

In “Neoptolemus and the Bow,” Ismene Lada-Richards argues that Neoptolemus is “a privileged, ‘internalised’ onlooker” here and that his desire to look closely at the bow reflects that of the spectators themselves (Lada-Richards 179). This is the moment in which the bow becomes the primary object of attention for the characters and spectators alike, and Lada-Richards emphasizes the importance of this: “No matter how inherently interwoven with the action Philoctetes’ bow is, Neoptolemus’ close look...theatricalises the object by converting it into a dramatic spectacle, a *thea*” (179)⁶⁸. The onstage gazes further direct the spectators’ gazes to the central object, and this focusing of attention on the prop heightens its significance and builds spectators’ interest and anticipation, thus laying the groundwork for a climactic moment, when Philoctetes actually hands the bow over to Neoptolemus.

Philoctetes tells Neoptolemus that he will allow him to touch the bow (667-69), but he will first go inside the cave to take what he needs for his journey home and show the young man how he has lived for the past ten years. In a further indication of Philoctetes’ growing trust of and closeness to Neoptolemus, he remarks as he exits that he will bring Neoptolemus in as well, “τὸ γὰρ / νοσοῦν ποθεῖ σε συμπαράστατην

⁶⁸ Lada-Richards’s larger argument is that “for large sections of the play’s first audience, i.e. those who were *memyēmenoi* in the Eleusinian initiation rites, both the dramatic framing of Neoptolemus’ plea (*Phil.* 654-75) as well as the emotions registered in its verbal level would have suggested a whole string of ritual associations falling into the realm of Eleusinian mystic initiation” (180). Such ritual connections and overtones may certainly run through the play and adhere to the bow, but I am more interested in the specifically theatrical aspects of the bow and of movement in the play.

λαβεῖν” [For being sick requires me to take you as an assistant.⁶⁹] (674-675). As the two exit together into the cave, the actors may be as physically close to each other as they have been to this point, further preparing for new intimacy that will come when they emerge.

As the men come out of the cave, after a Choral song, Philoctetes’ sickness strikes him, and Neoptolemus asks, “Do you want me to take hold of you and touch you?” [βούλη λάβωμαι δῆτα καὶ θίγω τί σου;] (761). Physical contact is thus offered, with the emphatic use of two verbs for grasping or touching (“λάβωμαι” and “θίγω”), but Philoctetes refuses it, asking instead that Neoptolemus take the bow and keep it safe for him:

μὴ δῆτα τοῦτό γ’· ἀλλὰ μοι τὰ τόξ’ ἐλῶν

τάδ’, ὥσπερ ἦτον μ’ ἀρτίως, ἕως ἀνῆ

765 τὸ πῆμα τοῦτο τῆς νόσου τὸ νῦν παρόν,

σῶζ’ αὐτὰ καὶ φύλασσε· (763-766)

[No, not that indeed! But taking this bow of mine, just as you asked recently, keep it safe and guard it, until this misery of the disease that is now present should release me.]

Neoptolemus reassures him that he will keep it safe and will not give it to anyone else (774-775), and Philoctetes then passes him the bow:

ἰδοῦ, δέχου, παῖ· τὸν φθόνον δὲ πρόσκυσον,

μὴ σοι γενέσθαι πολύπον’ αὐτά, μηδ’ ὅπως

⁶⁹ Literally, “συμπαραστάτης” is “one who stands (στάτης) together (συμ-) alongside (παρα-).” The word itself is very descriptive and emphatic with respect to the proximity, literal or symbolic, of the helper to the helped.

ἐμοί τε καὶ τῷ πρόσθ' ἐμοῦ κεκτημένῳ. (776-778)

[There, take it boy, and worship/prostrate⁷⁰ yourself before the god of ill will/jealousy⁷¹, lest it become for you a thing of much suffering, as it was for me and for the one who possessed it before me.]

The passing of the bow from Philoctetes to Neoptolemus is a turning point of the play. As various critics have noted, this moment represents a confirmation of trust and an exchange of power, among other possibilities, but on a more basic level, it also creates a point of connection between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus. This is the closest they have come to direct physical contact, and the bow serves as the intermediary between their outstretched hands. If we imagine this scene on the stage, we might even see a handclasp, a powerful mark of agreement, unity, and solemn trust, created through the medium of the bow.⁷² This moment, I would like to propose, shows the true power of “contact-point” props: they bring actor/characters together and create visual linkages with theatrical power that goes beyond plot points or symbolic resonance.

⁷⁰ Occasionally, in order to best capture the meaning, connotations, and metaphorical qualities of a word for readers without knowledge of Greek, I will provide two possible translations, as here: “worship/prostrate yourself before.”

⁷¹ Literally, it would be “prostrate yourself before jealousy,” but φθόνον can be taken as a personification, as my translation does.

⁷² See Glenys Davies, “The Significance of the Handshake Motif in Classical Funerary Art” (1985) for a good summary of the visual evidence for the meaning of the handshake. In the late Archaic period, the handshake often appears in mythological scenes to show the gods welcoming Heracles or Theseus as an equal (627-28). By the classical period, the handshake seems to indicate greeting, parting, agreement or unity, and sometimes marriage. The use of the handshake in iconography does not, of course, provide clear evidence for its use in everyday life, but since the theater is also an artistic medium with its own kind of iconography, the link to tragedy seems reasonable. Philoctetes’ own request for Neoptolemus to give his hand as a pledge confirms this usage. See also Kaimio’s Chapter 3, “Clasping Hands,” p. 26-34.

During his ensuing pain and delirium, Philoctetes does finally touch Neoptolemus directly, as he begs the young man to stay until he recovers and asks for his hand as a pledge (809-813). The tensions and emotions that the passing of the bow has aroused thus continue to grow throughout the scene of Philoctetes' sickness, reaching another high point with this handclasp and then another as Philoctetes desperately begs Neoptolemus to let him go (816-817). As Philoctetes' sickness leaves him and he drops into sleep, Neoptolemus finally releases his hold.

The remainder of the play continues to highlight the importance of the bow and to use physicality as a powerful element of the stage action. Odysseus' men physically restrain Philoctetes as he tries to jump off a cliff to avoid going to Troy and helping his enemies (1003), and indeed, Odysseus intends to carry him off by force, as if Philoctetes himself were an object. Philoctetes' physical relation to others continues to be of primary importance as Neoptolemus finally returns the bow to him, creating a second moment of contact through the bow (1286 ff.). In fact, this moment should be particularly strong in the theater, as Odysseus has boastfully given orders and stated intentions as if he himself had possession of the bow, yet for a spectator, the bow itself remains a strong visual reminder that the crux of the action remains with Neoptolemus, who stays true to his pledge not to allow anyone else to touch it. Neoptolemus takes hold of Philoctetes once more to prevent the angry man from shooting Odysseus with the infallible bow (1300-1302), and then the two are left alone to decide how to proceed. It is possible that Neoptolemus would support Philoctetes as they exit at the end of the play, having agreed to obey Heracles' orders to go to Troy, but there is no textual indication of contact.

Physical proximity and contact significantly shape the rhythms and tensions of *Philoctetes*, and the contact between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus through the medium of the bow first prefigures the ensuing direct contact, then reestablishes trust and partnership when Neoptolemus returns it. The bow is a central element of the visual life of this play, and its function and significance lie as firmly with its movement and position on stage as with its symbolic meanings and plot functions.

Like Philoctetes' bow, the urn in Sophocles' *Electra* has never lacked for critical attention, yet also like the bow, its function as a material connection between actor/characters has not generally been of interest. The poignancy of Electra's lament for the brother she believes to be dead, delivered while she holds the urn that supposedly contains his ashes, may naturally focus attention on the image of Electra holding the urn. However, the previous movements of the object and the subsequent position of the urn between Orestes and Electra as he orders her to put it down are also very significant for the movement and emotions of the scene.

When Orestes and the Paidagogus first enter, the urn is probably not visible to the audience. In his opening speech, Orestes mentions the urn as "hidden in the bushes" (55), and he details his plan to bring out the urn to show to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as proof of his death. The Paidagogus also mentions the urn when he later describes Orestes' death at the chariot race to Clytemnestra and Electra (757-758), so the spectators should be well aware of the object's significance by the time it makes an appearance with Orestes, Pylades, and possibly additional attendants⁷³ (1098). The

⁷³ There is no specific indication of further attendants, but mute extras are common, so the possibility cannot be excluded, though I think it most likely that only Orestes and

text does not indicate which character is carrying the urn at their entrance, but when Electra presses him for his news, Orestes confirms that his party is indeed carrying the urn with her brother's ashes (1113-1114).⁷⁴ Electra soon asks for the urn so that she might properly lament for her brother (1119-1122), and Orestes responds:

δόθ', ἥτις ἐστί, προσφέροντες· οὐ γὰρ ὥς
ἐν δυσμενείᾳ γ' οὔσ' ἐπαιτεῖται τόδε,
1125 ἀλλ' ἢ φίλων τις, ἢ πρὸς αἵματος φύσιν. (1123-1125)

[Give it to her, whoever she is, bringing it forth! For she begs this not as one in enmity, but as either one of his friends or one related by blood.]

Orestes' command indicates that someone else, either Pylades or possibly a mute attendant, hands the urn over to Electra.

If it is indeed Pylades who gives Electra the urn, this moment could prefigure their later marriage, a detail of the story that the audience would already know. The urn here becomes a contact point between a future husband and wife, and their outstretched arms can suggest the gesture of a groom grasping his bride's wrist or hand at their marriage.⁷⁵ In the midst of Electra's greatest despair, then, the audience

Pylades have entered here. Hugh Lloyd-Jones's Loeb edition does call for extra attendants in the stage directions.

⁷⁴ Orestes uses the first person plural ("κομίζομεν") for the main verb and a plural for the participle ("φέροντες"). First person plural does sometimes function as a sort of "royal we," but here it makes equal sense as a literal plural, referring to the delegation sent by Strophius ("Φωκῆς ... ἄνδρες ... τινες," 1107), so I do not think we can conclude that Orestes necessarily carries the urn himself.

⁷⁵ See Sutton, "Nuptial Eros" for a study of the visual motifs associated with weddings. Regarding this particular gesture, Sutton summarizes: "The groom's hold on the bride's arm or wrist was probably a traditional element in the wedding that

might see a glimmer of hope that all will eventually be well and that Electra will marry Pylades according to the traditional story.

Despite any closeness or hope that the gesture might evoke, this arrangement also ensures that the brother and sister remain physically distant before Electra's lament, as she receives the precious urn from another member of the party. This distance continues a pattern from the very beginning of the play: Orestes hears a voice lament and thinks it might be his sister, and he considers staying to listen to her lament, but instead he takes the Paidagogus' advice and exits to pour libations on his father's grave (80-85). The brother and sister so dear to each other remain separated during Electra's first lament, during the scene in which Electra first learns the news of Orestes' death through the report of the Paidagogus, and now during her receipt of the urn. The distance serves to heighten further the suspense of an anticipated recognition, and it may also cast Electra's devastation into stronger relief, increasing the sense of her isolation and possibly even convicting Orestes of some cruelty for not sparing his sister such pain, though he does not yet realize that she is indeed his sister.

At the end of her lament, the Chorus addresses her as "Electra," and the scene begins to move more directly toward recognition, as Orestes realizes that the woman is his sister and begins to lament for her own sufferings. As the scene builds, Orestes asks that she return the urn, which she absolutely refuses to do (1205 ff.). The two struggle back and forth, as Orestes demands the urn and Electra resists, and this

signified the legal transfer of the bride to her husband's control (*kyreia*)" (29). See also John Howard Oakley and Rebecca H. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1993), p. 45. Vase paintings often depict a groom clasping his bride's arm or wrist as he leads her to his house or to the bridal chamber, as in Oakley and Sinos's Figures 82-84, 86, 94, 106, *et alia* (p. 96, 98, 103, 110).

struggle could be either entirely verbal or both verbal and physical. The urn that Electra formerly understood to connect her to what remains of her brother could now be a physical connection between her and the man whom she will soon recognize as the true, and very much alive, Orestes. I think it highly unlikely that such a scene would be performed as involving the two pulling at the urn with all their strength, but it seems entirely possible that Orestes could at some point touch the urn as an emphatic gesture of entreaty or a stylized stand-in for physical force. Ultimately, however, Electra maintains possession of the urn (1216), and Orestes finally shows her their father's seal to confirm his true identity (1222-1223). The two ecstatically embrace by line 1226, and there is no further mention of the urn until the men prepare to go inside (1324-1325),⁷⁶ and by necessity of context, they must take it when they finally do enter at line 1375.

What happens to the urn during the recognition scene itself? There is no indication that Electra gives up the urn, even when she accepts the seal as proof of Orestes' true identity, so it is possible that the two embrace with the urn between them. Electra could put down the urn when she learns the truth, but this is a rather ungraceful solution: the urn is still necessary for the plot (both Sophocles' and Orestes'), so it must remain intact and readily available, and it does not seem theatrically viable for Electra to stoop down to place the urn safely on the ground at the height of the scene's emotion. If she does not keep the urn, the most reasonable

⁷⁶ Electra tells the men: “εἴσιτ’, ὦ ξένοι, / ἄλλως τε καὶ φέροντες οἳ ἂν οὔτε τις / δόμων ἀπώσται· οὔτ’ ἂν ἡσθείη λαβών” (1323-1325). [Go inside, strangers, since you bring something that no one could turn away from the house, nor take pleasure in taking.]

alternative would be for her to hand it off to Pylades, or an attendant, if there are any, and indeed, she must, in any event, return it to one of the men at some point before they exit into the house. Nevertheless, the climactic moment of recognition and embrace seems a theatrically clumsy moment for the exchange of a prop that is vitally significant to the play but not to the current moment itself. As difficult as an embrace might be while holding an urn, I think it most likely that Electra continues to hold the urn until at least line 1227, where she shows off Orestes to the Chorus, referring to him as “μηχαναῖσι μὲν / θανόντα, νῦν δὲ μηχαναῖς σεσωμένον” [dead by contrivances, but now saved by contrivances] (1228-1229). The urn is a physical, visible site of the μηχαναί [contrivances], so this would be a natural point at which to call attention to the object again.

Speculations about performance are particularly risky when the text provides no definite clues, so there is little that we can say with certainty about the movements of the urn through its stage life in *Electra*. It is mentioned several times before it appears; it comes on stage in the hands of Orestes, Pylades, or possibly an attendant; Pylades or an attendant hands it to Electra, who laments over it; at some point Electra must return it to one of the men, and they take it with them when they go inside the palace. These are the bare bones of the prop’s movement and the only certain indications of where it is at any point. Inferences beyond these specific necessary points may be probable, based on practical concerns and the logic of theatrical rhythms, but they remain only probabilities. What we can learn from this tracing of the urn’s stage life, however, is that its movement is actually quite complex, and its

emotional significance is not restricted to the moments of Electra's one sustained lament over it (1126-1170).

Even though we cannot reconstruct the prop's movements in the "original" performance or in the play's inherent context-driven requirements, we can at least appreciate that the prop's stage life extends beyond that emotional lament, both before and after it, and its movements, however exactly they might occur in any given performance, clearly affect the visual tableau and the affective movements of the scene. Further, the prop's materiality and its subsequent capacity to connect the actor/characters physically contribute strongly to its theatrical power. The urn's position on the stage can potentially foreshadow a marriage, supplement a sense of distance between brother and sister, then heighten the suspense of a possible recognition as Electra holds the object, then possibly connect them as an intermediary, if Orestes' attempt to take the urn from her is represented physically at all, and finally, possibly join in their embrace, if either Electra or Orestes holds it at that point. Whatever its precise movements might be, the urn significantly contributes to the movement of the scene itself, its ups and downs, its tensions and affective resonances, and it does so primarily as a result of the particular actor/character(s) who are in contact with it at any given moment.

The urn is an interesting example of a contact-point prop because the contact it brings about varies. Sometimes it is indirect, as when Electra holds it with the understanding that it contains her brother's ashes; sometimes it is direct but with a result of distancing, as when Electra receives the urn not from Orestes but from whomever he orders to hand it over to her; and only possibly sometimes the contact

involves the more typical effect of an intermediary object heightening tension as a prelude to direct contact, as in the case if Orestes does indeed touch the urn during his requests for Electra to put it down. The urn is famous with good reason: the object is highly significant both for the basic plot of the play and for the affective life of the theatrical performance, and the emotion, metatheatricality, and symbolic resonance of Electra lamenting so powerfully over an urn that does not, in fact, contain her brother's ashes have naturally driven much of the critical analysis. When we approach the prop more firmly from the perspective of its theatrical life, its materiality and movements on the stage, however, we should gain a new appreciation for its complexity and possibilities. Though we cannot precisely trace every movement or moment of contact, the urn's function as a contact point, whatever the nature of that contact might be in any given instance, is an important part of its effect on its scene. The various complex possibilities for its movements and effects should expand our understanding of what a "contact-point" prop might do and why its movements are so significant.

Most of the objects that I identify in Appendix II as likely "contact-point" props facilitate some kind of positive interaction between characters. In several cases, contact through a prop precedes direct physical contact or a recognition scene, and in these moments, the prop might heighten the audience's emotions as the scene builds towards a joyful recognition and/or a solidification of the characters' alignment through direct contact.⁷⁷ Contact through a prop might lead to a happy turn of events,

⁷⁷ In addition to the examples already discussed, Electra's examination of the lock of hair in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* may work similarly, and in Euripides' *Hippolytus*,

as in the case of a recognition scene, or even if circumstances are negative, as when a character is sick or dying, the contact itself might suggest trust, kinship, concern, allegiance, or any number of other positive qualities. This theatrical technique of contact through a prop may or may not have been common enough to be considered a recognizable convention in Greek tragedy, but however clear the trend might have been, Euripides' *Bacchae* takes that trend and turns it to sinister effect.

The beginning of *Bacchae* involves some conventional direct physical contact: Teiresias enters, presumably with a mute attendant to guide his blind steps.⁷⁸ Soon after Cadmus enters from the palace, he takes Teiresias' hand (197-198⁷⁹), and the old men support each other in what could be a parody of the conventional supportive contact between an old or blind man and an attendant. Whether or not this scene is indeed funny, as some have suggested, this contact is at least harmless. The old men are supporting each other and planning to dance in honor of Dionysus, acknowledging his divinity and his relationship to Cadmus.

the Nurse removes and replaces Phaedra's headdress (201-202, 243-250) before later touching her in ritual supplication (325-326). Creusa's passing of the vial of poison to the old man in *Ion* is more complex, since she is asking him to murder a man she does not realize is her son, but the passing itself is a moment of partnership and trust. To my mind, the only objects in this list whose contact likely evokes predominantly negative emotions or foreshadows negative events are the poisoned tunic in *Women of Trachis* (which involves very indirect contact and distance in both space and time), the nails and bonds that Hephaestus uses to secure Prometheus to the rock in *Prometheus Bound*, and the objects in the *Bacchae*.

⁷⁸ W. J. Verdenius notes that Roux (1970-72) has proposed that Teiresias entered without an attendant, guided by Dionysus but that Seidensticker (1982) has shown that lines 193 and 198 imply that an attendant has accompanied him. See Verdenius's note on line 174 (p. 241).

⁷⁹ ΚΑΔΜΟΣ: ...ἀλλ' ἐμῆς ἔχου χερός.

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ: ἰδοῦ, ξύναπτε καὶ ξυνωρίζου χέρα. (197-198)

[Cadmus: ...But take my hand.

Teiresias: Here, take hold of it and join (literally, "yoke together") it with my hand.]

When Pentheus enters, however, contact is used to a different end. He begins with a tirade against the supposed god and all his supporters, and he mockingly rejects Teiresias' warning that the god is indeed real and worthy of worship. His grandfather, Cadmus, then attempts to moderate his reaction and to convince him that even if the god does not exist, it is still more rational to acknowledge than to deny him. With a warning that he not suffer the same punishment for boasting as Actaeon did, Cadmus attempts to place an ivy garland on Pentheus' head:

ὃ μὴ πάθῃς σύ· δεῦρό σου στέψω κάρα

κισσῶ· μεθ' ἡμῶν τῶ θεῶ τιμὴν δίδου. (341-342)

[Don't suffer that! Here, I will crown your head with ivy. Give honor to the god with us!]

Pentheus, however, rejects Cadmus' offered contact:

οὐ μὴ προσοίσεις χεῖρα, βακχεύσεις δ' ἰών,

μηδ' ἐξομόρξῃ μωρίαν τὴν σὴν ἐμοί; (343-344)

[Don't lay a hand on me, but be a bacchant, going away! Don't wipe off your folly on me!]

This exchange tells us what Cadmus intends to do and that Pentheus refuses to allow the contact, but it gives little indication of how the physical action might be staged. It is unclear whether there is any contact between the two: Cadmus' statement that he will crown ("στέψω," a future-tense verb) Pentheus' head with ivy suggests that he has a garland in his hand, which would suit his bacchant ensemble in any case, but he may or may not extend that towards Pentheus. The force of Pentheus' retort suggests that it should be accompanied by a physical gesture of some sort, but with

our limited knowledge of ancient acting, we cannot know what it might have been. If Cadmus does physically approach and attempt to garland him, perhaps Pentheus stops his hand or brushes away the ivy. The contact here could be direct, if Pentheus touches Cadmus' hand, or it could take place through a prop, if Pentheus touches an offered ivy crown, or it could remain purely rhetorical, if Cadmus offers it without actually attempting the contact.

Although we do not know whether or what kind of contact might originally have occurred in this moment, the text clearly creates an offer and a refusal of contact. Cadmus' offer is one of assistance, agreement, and partnership, all qualities that we commonly find in moments of positive contact, and Pentheus' rejection encompasses all that Cadmus might be offering with his garland. Pentheus' retort also reinforces the sense of physicality in this scene, as he tells the old man not to "wipe off" [“ἐξομόρξῃ”] his folly on him (344). While the old men might be ridiculous, as they attempt to dance around in bacchant regalia, Pentheus' refusal to be infected by any of Cadmus' "folly" becomes an early step in his downfall: as the culmination of verbal arguments in favor of the god, the offer of assisting contact from a relative and elder provides an opening for Pentheus to relent, to reconsider the situation. His rejection of the physicality is a theatrically emphatic representation of his rejection of Dionysus, and it becomes the first in a sequence of significant moments of contact (or here, rejection of contact) that reflect his relationship with the god.

Pentheus' rejection of contact from a concerned relative suggests that all is not well. When he actually faces the captured stranger, whom he believes to be

responsible for “bringing a disease”⁸⁰ upon the women of the city, Pentheus’ curiosity grows into anger, as the man refuses to give clear answers to his questions, and his fury culminates in contact. At the stranger’s entrance, Pentheus had ordered the attendant to release his hands from their bonds (451), but at the climax of his frustration, he approaches the disguised god with a most impious contact:

{Πε.} πρῶτον μὲν ἄβρὸν βόστρυχον τεμῶ σέθεν.

{Δι.} ἱερὸς ὁ πλόκαμος· τῷ θεῷ δ’ αὐτὸν τρέφω.

495 {Πε.} ἔπειτα θύρσον τόνδε παράδος ἐκ χεροῖν.

{Δι.} αὐτός μ’ ἀφαιροῦ· τόνδε Διονύσῳ φορῶ. (493-496)

[Pentheus: First, I will cut your delicate/pretty curl.

Dionysus: The lock is sacred: I grow it for the god.

Pentheus: Next, give over the thyrsus from your hands.

Dionysus: Take it from me yourself: I carry it for Dionysus.]

Does Pentheus actually cut Dionysus’ hair and physically take away his thyrsus? Such an action would certainly be highly intrusive and violent as behavior towards a god, and Oliver Taplin has argued it would be too blasphemous to be enacted physically: “It has been suggested that Pentheus actually cut the stranger’s hair and took away his thyrsus. But such a crudely blasphemous action would surely be given more explicit commentary in the words: rather, the impression is reinforced that the acceptance or rejection of the god can be made through these material emblems” (Taplin (1978) 98). If material emblems do serve as avenues for accepting

⁸⁰ “ὃς ἐσφέρει νόσον / καινὴν γυναιξὶ καὶ λέχη λυμαίνεται” [...who brings a new disease upon the women and defiles/outrages their marriages] (353-354)

or rejecting a god, though, why should that avenue remain a symbolic, unfulfilled one in this moment?

It is possible that Pentheus' impiety here is restricted to his verbal threats, but the physical fulfillment of his words would better prepare for the severity of his punishment. Furthermore, the language suggests that he does carry out his threats: he begins with a future-tense statement ("τέμω," "I will cut," 493), which would be equally appropriate for either a threat or a prelude to the action itself, but his next statement implies that he has already accomplished the first action. He begins with "ἔπειτα," meaning "then," "next," or "afterward," and follows it with a command, the imperative "παράδος"⁸¹ ("give over," 495). If this second threat involved another first-person, future-tense, indicative verb stating what Pentheus intends to do, these two threats would be parallel and might suggest that he has not, and perhaps will not, carry them out. The imperative "παράδος," however, has an immediacy to its command that suggests that the pre-conditions to "ἔπειτα" [next] have been met: the line makes the most sense theatrically if Pentheus has indeed cut a lock of the stranger's hair by this point. It would also make sense for him to strip his prisoner of his thyrsus, which Pentheus might, after all, consider a weapon, before sending him off to be locked in the dark. Taplin might wish for "more explicit commentary in the words," but lack of further commentary in the text certainly does not prove that the action does not occur, and the physical realization of the contact in performance might even make such verbal elaboration unnecessary.

⁸¹ The aspect is aorist.

If the contact that Pentheus describes does happen here, its significance should be obvious: given the rarity of physical contact and particularly the enormous impiety of touching a god in such a way, this contact should bring a strong sense of foreboding. The contact itself is likely through props. Pentheus' taking of the thyrsus is clearly an example of a contact-point prop, as he need not touch the stranger directly at all, yet they would be briefly connected through the thyrsus itself. If he does indeed cut a lock of hair, this contact could be understood either as direct contact, in the sense that he touches the other's hair, or as contact through an object, in the sense that he might touch only the lock of hair itself, which, furthermore, would be part of an actor's wig.

The trend of significant contact culminates in Dionysus' return of the invasive, violent contact as he dresses Pentheus to spy on the bacchants. Pentheus has rejected positive, assisting contact from an ally, then imposed negative, violent, even blasphemous contact on the divinity that he does not recognize as such. In the dressing scene, Dionysus' contact with Pentheus makes clear that the latter is now under the god's control. Dionysus points out a curl that has come loose from Pentheus' headdress (928-29), then proposes to fix it:

{Δι.} ἀλλ' αὐτὸν ἡμεῖς, οἷς σε θεραπεύειν μέλει,
πάλιν καταστελοῦμεν· ἀλλ' ὄρθου κάρα.

{Πε.} ἰδοῦ, σὺ κόσμει· σοὶ γὰρ ἀνακείμεσθα δῆ. (932-934)

[Dionysus: Then, since it is my care/job to serve you, I will put it back in order. But hold your head straight!

Pentheus: There, you dress/adorn me (κόσμει, imperative): for indeed I am given over to you.]

Dionysus has conquered Pentheus to the point that the latter willingly accepts contact that almost mirrors the violence he previously inflicted on a prisoner. Contact again comes through a lock of hair and, here, possibly other clothing articles as well.⁸² This moment is the culmination of a series of ominous scenes of contact. To this point, Pentheus has only inflicted contact on others, and his grateful acceptance of another's offered contact now shows that he has lost the agency and control of his own body that he was previously so careful to guard.

The gruesome physicality of Pentheus' final punishment, his offstage dismemberment, followed by the onstage presentation of his body parts and his mother's triumphant waving of his head impaled on her thyrsus, appropriately fulfills the theatrical emphasis on contact and physicality that runs through several of Pentheus' most significant scenes of confrontation. The thyrsus connects Agave to the head of her beloved son just as locks of hair and thyrsoi have formerly connected Pentheus to Dionysus or Cadmus. *Bacchae* is a complex play, and its power and meaning cannot be limited to any one explanation, but these various moments of contact are particularly climactic and create a sequence that should increasingly focus audience attention on such moments. Furthermore, if contact through a prop is a recognizable convention or trend in Greek tragedy, these moments in *Bacchae* should

⁸² Dionysus presumably touches, or at least mimes touching, both the lock of hair and some kind of headpiece here. He also points out other problems with Pentheus' costume and provides some advice in response to questions, but the text does not indicate any other clear moments in which he adjusts Pentheus' clothing or props. See lines 935-944.

be especially salient for an audience that would likely expect contact to suggest positive feelings or outcomes. On the specific level of theatricality and stagecraft, contact, either direct or prop-mediated, thus becomes one important thread of the play's movement and meaning.

While props may serve a number of different functions in the theater, the use of a prop to forge a point of contact between actor/characters is a valuable case study for the potential power of a prop in performance. As a final example of a contact-point prop, I would like to introduce briefly a phenomenon that I will explore more deeply in Chapter 4, "The Touch of the Spectator: Perception as a Point of Contact": a prop that covers an actor/character, most often the face. Many examples of covering or uncovering involve contact between actor/characters through the medium of a prop, as one character covers or uncovers the other. In some cases the covered or uncovered person may actually be a corpse, and thus probably a dummy, but in others, the character is alive and played by a speaking actor.

Moments of covering or uncovering should bring the emotion and poignancy that seem to accompany most contact-prop scenes, and in this subcategory, that emotion might be particularly high, as the covered or uncovered character is in a particularly low or pathetic state. When Theseus covers his son's face, the mangled Hippolytus is dying (1457-1458).⁸³ This moment might particularly resonate with an

⁸³ Hippolytus asks his father to cover his face with his clothes: "κεκαρτέρηται τᾶμ' ὄλωλα γάρ, πάτερ. / κρύψον δέ μου πρόσωπον ὡς τάχος πέπλοις" (1457-1458). [My enduring is finished, for I am lost, father. But cover my face with my garments with all speed!]. The text does not specifically indicate that Theseus then does so, but the dramatic logic of the scene would certainly demand such. He probably covers his son before or during his next (and final) speech of lament (1459-1461).

audience, as it should invoke early moments in the play in which the wretched Phaedra first calls for her servants to remove her headdress or veil, then desperately asks her Nurse to cover her head again (201-202, 243-245, 250). The second moment, in which the Nurse recovers Phaedra, involves contact through the veil⁸⁴ that precedes the direct contact of the Nurse's later supplication of her mistress, a sequence that we have also seen with other contact-point props, such as Philoctetes' bow. We scholars may argue over whether either Hippolytus or Phaedra is a sympathetic character and to what degree, but in the theater, these moments of covering and uncovering, of a caring servant or father coming into contact with a weakened, suffering character through the medium of a garment, should surely heighten emotion and concern. In a simple, practical sense, the function of props such as these is to cover or uncover an actor/character; in a dramatic or theatrical sense, however, their function may sometimes be the same as that of a contact-point prop.

Summary: Types and Functions of Props

We have seen that props in extant Greek tragedy are relatively rare, with most plays involving just a few necessary objects, and that these objects may be classified by what they are or by what they do. The most common types of items include significant pieces of clothing that actors manipulate, weapons, and objects related to ritual or with religious significance. An examination of the functions of props may tell us more about the role and importance of props in tragedy: they most often aid in

⁸⁴ The Nurse does comply with Phaedra's request for her to cover her head or face, as she begins her next speech with "κρύπτω" [I cover it] (250).

identifying characters or revealing something about their circumstances, but they may also be the primary stimuli for creating particular kinds of scenes, such as recognition scenes, confrontations, scenes of deception, rituals, or moments of contact between actor/characters.

A prop can provide a material focal point for the audience, accruing a variety of associations and meanings with a complexity that can reach beyond that of a simple icon or familiar, predetermined symbol. Further, a prop's relationship with a live actor lends it an active theatrical life, with the actor's contact and manipulation allowing it to move and interact with the action in ways that remain unavailable to other articles of stagecraft, such as an inert backdrop or a robe that never acquires meaning or function beyond its simple "robeness." To return, then, to a possibility proposed in my earlier definition of "prop," are these unique properties and functions of props dependent on the presence of a visible, material prop on the stage, or can they sometimes be fulfilled by a prop that remains physically absent or simply invisible to the audience?

Unseen Props: From Trinkets to Dragon-Chariots

The least contentious example of an unseen but theatrically real prop would be an object that the action and logic of the play demand but that would be too small for an audience to see. In the context of the ancient Greek stage, such a phenomenon may have been common, as many handheld objects in a large acting space before a large audience would surely have remained unseen, or at least indistinct, to a large portion

of that audience.⁸⁵ Extant tragedy provides several probable examples. In Sophocles' *Electra*, Orestes presents his father's seal to Electra to prove his true identity: "τήνδε προσβλέψασά μου / σφραγίδα πατρός ἔκμαθ' εἰ σαφῇ λέγω" [Look upon this seal of my father and learn if I speak clearly!] (1222-1223). This token serves its purpose and stimulates Electra's recognition of her brother, but the action quickly moves on to their joyous reunion, with no further description of or emphasis on the seal itself. As a very small, handheld prop, the seal might well have been too small for the audience to see, and in this case, the object indeed might not even be missed. It fills a simple function, and while the characters' words demand that the spectators understand Orestes to be presenting a seal, the text does not elevate the seal to any special significance in its own right, and there is no lengthy description to draw the gaze and sustained interest of the audience. Perhaps the actor did have a small prop in his hand, but all that is required for the scene is that the audience understand or imagine that the character has a seal.

Euripides' *Ion* provides a more complex example of a possible unseen prop. After she becomes convinced that Ion is her husband's illegitimate son and will now cut off the line of Erechtheus, Creusa presents a small golden vial ("χρύσωμ' Ἀθάνης τόδε," 1030) containing one drop of the Gorgon's blood to her faithful old Paidagogus, with instructions to pour the poison secretly into Ion's wine. The deictic

⁸⁵ While the exact sizes of the theater and audience in the fifth century remain unclear, scholars have developed some reasonable estimates. Jean-Charles Moretti, in his synthesis of archeological evidence for the Theatre of Dionysus, estimates that the theater held 10,000-15,000 spectators, given an estimate of 0.40 meters per seat, and that the orchestra was approximately 30 meters wide (395, 397). For further discussion of the physical space, see the section "θέατρον: The Physical Space" in my Introduction, pages 28-36.

τόδε suggests that there is indeed a vial, and theatrical logic might also suggest its presence, as the object is very important, and Creusa has taken pains to describe its history and appearance (987-1038). Nevertheless, Creusa's description has also made it clear that this vial must be tiny: she has two vials, each containing only one drop of blood (1003, 1017), and she carries them on her wrist, perhaps as something like a charm bracelet (1009). The passing of this vial from Creusa to the old man seals their partnership and their specific plan against Ion, and in performance, the magical object could be, just for a moment, as much a powerful *thea*, an object of the audience's gaze, as Philoctetes' bow.

The extensive discussion of Creusa's vial should stimulate a spectatorial desire to see it, yet it remains improbable that spectators in the large Greek theater could have seen a tiny vial possibly the size of the actor's fingertip. Thus a few possibilities present themselves: the actors could have a prop much larger than the tiny size they describe, abstracted for the purpose of being visible to the audience; there might be a prop that is indeed reasonably realistic in size for the vial, and most, possibly all, of the spectators simply would not be able to see it; or the actors might mime an appropriate object, and the spectators would imaginatively fill in the special golden vial. In each case, the spectators' desire to see the mysterious vial is thwarted to some degree, and they must compensate for some lack in the representation. If there is a large object substituting for what the dramatic logic and rhetorical description demand be a tiny one, the spectators must imaginatively transform that abstract substitute into the little vial. If there is a realistically small object or no object at all, the spectators must imaginatively create the vial from the descriptions in the language.

The example of the golden vial of Gorgon's blood shows that in at least one case in extant tragedy, a play demands an object whose material representation on the stage must fall short of the significance and identity of the dramatic object. On the one hand, it is important that the spectators understand the object as materially present, capable of movement, and possessing other qualities inherent to stage properties; on the other hand, exactly what it is that stands in for the object demanded by the play is less important than the spectators' willing imaginations and the language that allows them to create that necessary object imaginatively. The language of the play is vital to the understanding of what this object is, and yet the theatrical role of the object extends beyond its linguistic invocation, as the object must be *understood* as material and capable of manipulation by actors, whether or not it is so. I would like to term such a theatrical phenomenon a "rhetorized prop."

In his phenomenological study of the theater, Bert States proposes that language, setting, actors, and objects come together influence each other in the creation of a theatrical world. As he explains, "the scene 'permeates' the speech and the speech illuminates the setting" (52). To some extent, he argues, language in the theater can work similarly to a literary image, with each word adding more detail and meaning,⁸⁶ but ultimately the theater is a more complex medium, with "a combination of literary, pictorial, and even musical images constantly interpenetrating each other" (53). Thus language not only builds up images through accretion of details, but it also

⁸⁶ For his understanding of the way a literary image works, States quotes Rudolph Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1969), pp. 249-50: "....A successful literary image grows through what one might call accretion by amendment. Each word, each statement, is amended by the next into something closer to the intended total meaning...." (qtd. States 53).

“amends the pictorial image of the setting” (53). That is, language in the theater can transform a single basic setting from Agamemnon’s palace to the Greek camp at Troy to Apollo’s Temple at Delphi: “Even if nothing has changed scenographically, the play appropriates the stage as part of its qualitative world as established by its poetry” (53).

States focuses his discussion of what he terms “the powers of rhetorical scenery” on Shakespeare’s theater, in which the language often creates impossible scenery and action, such as the cliffs of Dover or a great battle scene (54, ff.). I will return to this concept of “rhetorical scenery” in the next chapter, for a consideration of Greek tragedy’s “unstageable” actions, but to begin with a simpler model, I would like to apply this idea to the possibility of absent, unseen, or very abstract props on the stage. I have proposed the term “rhetoricized props” for these phenomena, and I define a “rhetoricized prop” as: *a stage property that is created by the language of the play, dramatic logic and context, movement of the actors, and imaginations of the spectators but that is not represented by a physical object on stage; or, such a prop that is represented by an object that is either too small for the spectators to see or too abstract to represent the prop with any realism, as compared to the linguistic and contextual stipulations of the prop’s identity and appearance.* As my choice of the word “rhetoricized” suggests, the language of the play is particularly important in this creation, yet it is insufficient on its own. In fact, this preferring of language is due in large part simply to the primary evidence we have in the case of the Greek theater, the texts of the plays. Without enactment by live actors and the willing cooperation of the audience, language cannot take such a prop beyond a literary image or a simple

concept, so while the evidence for particular examples may reside primarily in the language that survives, each example remains a complex interaction of several theatrical forces.

Orestes' seal and Creusa's vial provide a natural starting point for the rhetoricized prop: each item must be dramatically real, in that it serves a specific function in the narrative of the play and the onstage action, yet each likely remains unseen, or at least very unclear, for the majority of the audience. The characters' words and the dramatic situation give the spectators the information they need to imagine the object that exists in the world of the play. Locks of hair, often presented in tragedy as offerings to honor dead loved ones, may also function in this way, and there may be other items whose size likely relegates them to this prop-type. Such small objects are also relatively easy to mime, and from a practical perspective, it may be easier for actors to mime them than to handle real objects that always present the possibility of breaking, being dropped, or otherwise malfunctioning.

Very small props on the Greek stage, then, were most likely unseen, regardless of whether they were physically present. Why else might a prop remain absent or unseen? In what kinds of situations might a very abstract object stand in for a more specific prop? As usual, our evidence is very limited, and we cannot know what the Greeks might have done in any particular instance, but the surviving texts do yield some clues. To return briefly to Creusa's vial, this prop is characterized not only by its small size but also by its significance and the degree of attention that the characters give it. Creusa relates in detail the history and supernatural origins of this special vial and its deadly poison: Athena gave the two vials to the infant Erichthonius, Creusa's

ancestor, hanging them on gold chains. Each contained a drop of the Gorgon's blood: one drop dripped from the "hollow vein" ("κοίλης...φλεβός," 1011) when the Gorgon was slaughtered, and this has healing powers, while the other drop came from the serpents and is deadly. Creusa and the old man spend about fifty lines tracing the history of the vial, marveling at its properties, and explaining its role in their plan. Such sustained attention and descriptive detail serve not only to stimulate spectators' interest in the object, but also to provide raw materials they need for imagining the special, supernatural vial they cannot see, and thus an important characteristic of this prop is its treatment in the language of the play.

The degree and type of a prop's description and emphasis in the language of the play may thus be a clue towards whether it needs to be represented physically, visibly, and/or realistically on the stage. Euripides' *Hippolytus* provides an example of a prop that exists almost exclusively on the level of language: a highly rhetoricized, speaking prop that may not necessarily be represented by a physical object. When Theseus looks upon his wife's dead body, he laments her death and calls out for someone to tell him what has happened.⁸⁷ He then sees a tablet and grants it the agency to show him information:

ἔα ἔα·

τί δὴ ποθ' ἦδε δέλτος ἐκ φίλης χερὸς

ἡρτημένη; θέλει τι σημῆναι νέον;

....

⁸⁷ See especially lines 840-843: Theseus wants to hear ("κλύω") the story and wants someone to tell ("εἴποι") him what happened.

φέρ' ἐξελίξας περιβολὰς σφραγισμάτων

ἴδω τί λέξαι δέλτος ἥδε μοι θέλει. (856-857, 864-865)

[Oh, oh! What is this, this tablet hanging from her dear hand? Does it wish to show me something new? Come, unfolding the coverings of the seals, may I see what this tablet wishes to say to me.]

Before he reads it, Theseus represents this tablet as a combination of visual and aural qualities: he looks at it and wonders if it will show (“σημῆναι”) him something, but he also imagines it as speaking to him (“λέξαι”). As the Chorus laments the impending disaster, Theseus reads the tablet, and at the Chorus’ request to hear what it says, he exclaims:

βοᾷ βοᾷ δέλτος ἄλαστα. πᾶ φύγω

βάρος κακῶν; ἀπὸ γὰρ ὀλόμενος οἴχομαι,

οἶον οἶον εἶδον μέλος ἐν γραφαῖς

φθεγγόμενον τλάμων. (877-880)

[The tablet cries out, it cries out inconsolable things! To where can I flee from the weight of the evils? For I go destroyed, such, such is the crying out of song that I, wretched, have seen in the writings!]

After reading the tablet, Theseus focuses on the aural in his expression of what the tablet is doing. It shouts forth (“βοᾷ”), and its writings show him a crying out or utterance (“φθεγγόμενον”) of a song (“μέλος”). Theseus declares that he will not hold back the destructive evil (“ὀλοὸν κακόν,” 884) within his mouth any longer, and he then publicly curses Hippolytus, calling on Poseidon to honor his promise to fulfill three curses with death.

The tablet itself and the scene as a whole are characterized by the power of words: the tablet is a physical incarnation of Phaedra's voice, and its writing cries out its message; Theseus responds to the shouting note by making a loud, public curse, and by his speaking it, his son will die.⁸⁸ On the one hand, Theseus can look at the golden seal (862), open the folds of the note (864), and read its writings; on the other hand, the importance of the tablet is in what it speaks forth, and Theseus' response to it is likewise verbal. The tablet, then, may be an example of a rhetoricized prop. There could be a physical object on the stage for Theseus to manipulate, and as a writing tablet, that object might or might not be large enough for most of the audience to see. The theatrical function of that prop, however, may be filled just as well by the actor's miming of a small tablet: the object's significance is in what it says, and the audience must rely upon Theseus' words for that information. Further, Theseus' description of the gold seal and the foldings of the tablet may also provide the necessary information for the spectators to fill in imaginatively the visual and physical elements of the object.

Given that this prop could easily be played either by a physical tablet (or tablet-like object) or by an actor's words and gestures, what might be the significance of the latter option? The original performance might or might not have employed a physical prop, but the play itself may actually be best enhanced and supported by a lack of a physical, visible object here. Within the scene itself, Theseus' emphasis on the verbal nature of the tablet rhetoricizes that prop, and a mimed object would further

⁸⁸ In J. L. Austin's framework of the performative utterance, Theseus' curse would be an interesting example of a powerful, "happy" performative. His words ensure Hippolytus' death, yet the curse also relies on a promise (a typical form of performative language) by Poseidon for its fulfillment.

heighten the sense that the object's significance is in its words, which, further, prepares for the absolute power of the words of Theseus' ensuing curse. Moreover, Artemis' announcement to Theseus of his disastrous mistake at the end of the play emphasizes a distinction between things seen and things unseen, continuing the play's interest in the power of words and the nature of knowledge.

After the messenger graphically recounts Hippolytus' death, Artemis appears and confronts Theseus, asking him why he rejoices that he has killed his son:

Θησεῦ, τί τάλας τοῖσδε συνήδη,
παῖδ' οὐχ ὁσίως σὸν ἀποκτείνας
ψευδέσι μύθοις ἀλόχου πεισθεὶς
ἀφανῆ; φανερὰν δ' ἔσχεθες ἄτην. (1286-1289)

[Theseus, why do you, wretched one, rejoice at these things, having killed your son in a way not divinely sanctioned, being persuaded of unseen things by the false words of your wife? But clearly seen is the destruction you have taken.]

Artemis' revelation of the truth of what Theseus has done clearly contrasts the unseen with the seen through her opposition of “ἀφανῆ” and “φανερὰν,” the words' placement next to each other further heightening the contrast (1289). Indeed, Hippolytus' mangled body will soon be brought onto the stage for Theseus and the audience to look upon, emphasizing the “seen destruction” that Phaedra's and Theseus' words have wrought. This opposition of seen and unseen would be further heightened, particularly on a metatheatrical level, if the tablet itself were to remain unseen for the audience. If the Greek stage sometimes employed physical, visible

props and sometimes unseen or absent ones, Euripides could be playing with that theatrical convention throughout *Hippolytus*, thus adding a specific level of reference to his investigation into the power of words, the relation between the visual and the aural, and the sources and nature of knowledge.

Euripides' *Hippolytus* is a fertile case study for the absent or unseen rhetoricized prop because it provides a glimpse into the possible payoff for such a theatrical technique. The particular treatment of Phaedra's tablet through Theseus' rhetorical invocation of it with imagery of crying out may even hearken back to one of the most notorious props on the Greek stage: the ornate purple fabric in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

Agamemnon's trampling of the expensive, ornate fabric as he enters his palace is a climactic moment in the tragedy, and it is tempting to imagine its appearance and symbolic value in elaborate detail, as some critics have done. Despite its strong appeal, however, I would contend that this prop is not actually very important in its physical, visible qualities. At the end of her speech of welcome, Clytemnestra orders her servants to spread out fabrics ("πετάσμασιν," 909) on the ground for Agamemnon's path to the door. Through the scene, it becomes clear that this fabric is very ornate and luxurious, though translators disagree on the exact definitions of the words that describe it. It seems to be richly embroidered, and the dominant color is likely purple ("άλουργέσιν," 946 and "πορφύρας," 957). The physical role of the fabric simply involves its being spread out by the servants, at Clytemnestra's command. There is no indication in the text that Clytemnestra holds it out, or asks the servants to do so, for all to examine.

The fabric's significance to the scene suggests that there was probably a physical object on the stage, but, as I have explained in an earlier article involving the differences between tragic and comic props, "that object is so laden with detail and symbolic value through the play's language that it takes on a much more complex meaning than an ordinary garment or carpet, even a sumptuous one" (24).⁸⁹

Clytemnestra and Agamemnon sustain their argument about this fabric for about fifty lines (904-950), and their descriptions and arguments build up the precise significance of that fabric, both in its expensive luxury and in the potential meaning of walking on it. Further, just as Theseus describes Phaedra's note as crying out, Agamemnon uses imagery of speech or crying out to describe the inappropriate nature of walking on such ornate fabric: "χωρίς ποδοψήστρων τε καὶ τῶν ποικίλων / κληδῶν ἀϋτεῖ" [The cry (or "appellation" or "omen") of "foot-wipers" and of "intricate" (or "multi-colored" or possibly "embroidered") shouts in different directions] (926-927).⁹⁰

Language is thus central to the shaping of this object, and in a sense, the idea of the object becomes more important than the object itself.

In this case, then, the prop is rhetoricized in that the language about it is necessary to create its specificity of meaning and appearance and in the sense that the object itself is imagined as speaking. Nevertheless, the context of the play does call for some kind of physical object to play this role. Although the text does not demand that

⁸⁹ See Powers, "Helen's Theatrical *Méchanê*: Props and Costumes in Euripides' *Helen*." I discuss the purple cloth in *Agamemnon* as a point of contrast to the very physical, earthy, mundane props typical of Old Comedy.

⁹⁰ In his Loeb edition, Alan H. Sommerstein provides two further ways of rendering the imagery. He translates: "It is cryingly obvious that the words 'embroidered' and 'doormat' don't go well together." He adds a more literal translation in a footnote: "the appellation of 'foot-wipers' and 'embroidered' cries out divergently."

Clytemnestra unroll and display the fabric, the scene would certainly make more sense if the servants do have something to stretch out on the ground and if Agamemnon does indeed walk on it. This, then, may be a good example of a rhetoricized prop based on an abstract object on the stage. The physical fabric manipulated by the actors need not be as expensive and intricately woven and dyed as the fabric that Clytemnestra and Agamemnon imply, but their words can fill in any lack of detail in the appearance of the physical object, and the theatrical reality of what may look, on the surface, like a much simpler roll of cloth, can become the extremely luxurious weaving that the play demands. The rhetorical aspect of the prop supports and specifies the physical object, and if the object itself is simple and abstract to the point that it could not possibly reach up to the quality that the language requires, the spectators' imaginations are freer to substitute the most costly and ornate fabric they can imagine.

The possibility for an abstract object, that is, an object that is only a schematic representation of the object that it represents, to stand in for a prop that rhetoricization and spectators' imaginations make complete should be particularly valuable if the prop is in some way unstageable. The rich fabric in *Agamemnon* could be such an unstageable prop to some degree, in that the unique luxury of the prop implied by the text probably could not be represented precisely on the stage. Euripides' *Medea*, however, provides a much stronger example with the chariot with which Medea makes her escape.

Medea's chariot is a popular object of speculation and wild imagination, among both ancient Greek artists and modern scholars. It is possibly the most dominant visual image on stage at the end of the play, and its renderings in vase

painting suggest that it was indeed a popular object in the Greek imagination.⁹¹ The vase paintings themselves cannot be used as evidence for what the chariot in the production of Euripides' play might have looked like, but they do reflect an interest, possibly inspired as much by myth as by any theatrical performance, in this supernatural object.

Euripides' text actually gives very little information about this chariot. There is only one direct reference to it in the text, as Medea enters and responds to Jason's cries for her punishment:

... εἰ δ' ἐμοῦ χρεῖαν ἔχεις,

λέγ' εἴ τι βούλῃ, χειρὶ δ' οὐ ψάψεις ποτέ·

τοιόνδ' ὄχημα πατρὸς Ἥλιος πατήρ

δίδωσιν ἡμῖν, ἔρυμα πολεμίας χερός. (1319-1322)

[If you have a need/favor of me, say it if you wish, but you will never touch me with your hand; such is the chariot [ὄχημα] that my father's father Helios has given to me, a bulwark against a hostile hand.]

Medea does not describe her chariot with the lavish detail that tradition might suggest, and indeed, we might expect more detail in the language to make it a rhetoricized prop. Medea's words indicate clearly only a few significant facts: she is in a chariot with her sons' bodies; her grandfather Helios, the sun god, provided her with that chariot; and, based on her own assertion and the context, she is definitively out of

⁹¹ See, for example, the Lucanian hydria attributed to the Policoro Painter (Policoro, Museo Nazionale della Siritide 35296) and the Lucanian calyx-krater possibly by the same painter (Cleveland Museum of Art 1991.1), both of c. 400 BC. See Taplin, *Pots and Plays* for full-color images of these vases, along with discussions of them in relation to Euripides' *Medea* (117-123).

Jason's reach. The context also suggests that the chariot can fly, and if this is the chariot that Helios would normally use to pull the sun through the sky, mythological tradition would suggest that it is drawn by horses.⁹²

The tradition that dragons pull Medea's chariot may come from vase painting, but the scholia also support this idea. In his study of Medea's final appearance, Maurice P. Cunningham summarizes such evidence: "One scholium (VB *ad* 1317) states that Medea speaks standing aloft, or, according to a variant reading (B), standing upon a tower. The second scholium (B *ad* 1320) repeats the substance of the first in a somewhat fuller form: Medea appears aloft in a car drawn by dragons or snakes and carrying off the children. The hypothesis makes the snakes winged" (152). As Cunningham acknowledges, these statements may depend upon later traditions, and further, I would add that they may also reflect the visual traditions of the scene in vase painting.

Practical considerations render an elaborate, spectacular staging of a flying dragon-drawn chariot unlikely, if not impossible. It is unclear whether the *méchanê* (crane) had even been developed by the time of *Medea*'s first staging in 431 BC, and indeed, this stage machinery was probably never capable of lifting and flying around an elaborate chariot with an actor, two dummies, and some kind of dragons or snakes.⁹³ The first scholium that Cunningham cites may give the most accurate description of the basic, physical staging of Medea at the end of the play: she stands

⁹² See, for example, Homeric Hymn 31, to Helios ("ἵπποι," line 15.)

⁹³ In a lecture at Cornell University, C. W. Marshall made this argument, showing that the laws of physics and the capabilities of Greek technology necessitate a much more conservative understanding of the *méchanê* than has generally been assumed.

aloft, possibly on a tower. Medea could be standing on the *skênê* roof,⁹⁴ possibly with some basic representation of a chariot around her, and this staging would lend her own reference to the chariot an explanatory function. Medea tells Jason that her chariot, from her grandfather Helios, will prevent him from ever touching her, and in doing so, she also tells the spectators, immediately upon her entrance, that they should understand her to be in such a chariot (“ὄχημα,” 1321). Whatever physical representation of a chariot that the stagecraft might entail, its theatrical reality becomes a supernatural, unreachable chariot through Medea’s rhetoricization of it, brief though it may be. Renowned for her sorcery, Medea performs her final conjuring act with the summoning of this theatrical device, not only on the stage but also in the minds of her spectators.

We have very little evidence for the staging of Medea’s chariot in the fifth century, and we can never know exactly how the Greeks managed it. Nevertheless, I would contend that we have good reason to be conservative in our conjectures about the mechanics of the chariot, given the practical considerations of staging it and the great potential for language and gesture to stimulate spectators’ imaginations to create a detailed, powerful theatrical reality. Images of Medea’s escape in vase paintings may indeed show an elaborate, flying, dragon-drawn chariot, but vase painting conventionally does provide more detail than a play’s language suggests, and scholars are now generally agreed that we cannot use those paintings as evidence for actual

⁹⁴ The *theologeion*, a high platform extending above the *skênê* roof, would also be a possibility, if such a structure existed at this time.

theatrical stagings.⁹⁵ Why, then, should we jump to a spectacular, Hollywood-like concept of the staging of *Medea*'s final scene? A brief survey of scholarship on the ending of the play reveals a general, usually unspoken assumption that Medea's chariot is indeed drawn by dragons,⁹⁶ and yet the play's own language provides no grounds at all for this understanding.⁹⁷

Our lack of evidence should nudge us toward a simpler understanding of the physical staging of the chariot, given the practical realities that support such a conjecture, but the nature of the theater still allows us to propose that the theatrical reality of Medea's escape, that is, the details that the spectators imagine and understand to be true within the world of the play, may be much more elaborate. A flying chariot drawn by dragons or serpents (or horses, for that matter) and carrying a live actor and two dummies may indeed be "unstageable" in a realistic sense, but

⁹⁵ Taplin's 2007 *Pots and Plays* is a recent effort to reexamine the connections between vase paintings and tragedy. In his introduction to the project, he points to this overriding scholarly trend towards "serious questioning of how art and literature relate, indeed whether they relate at all" (vi). Taplin's study is a movement away from such a skeptical stance, but he nevertheless appreciates the distance between a staged performance and a later vase painting.

⁹⁶ See, for example: "Even with her dragon-drawn chariot..." (Cowherd, 135), "on her dragon-chariot" (Schlesinger, 89); "...the dragon chariot has obvious theatrical and figurative advantages" (Lawrence, 54); "Medea appears, literally out of his reach, in a flying chariot drawn by winged serpents" (Worthington, 502). Mastronarde, in his 2002 commentary on *Medea*, is more careful in his consideration of the possibilities. After a discussion of various possibilities and sources, he concludes: "Thus it is possible that the prop used in 431 was already a serpent-chariot, but it is also possible that this was the iconographic choice of a subsequent production of the play in South Italy or of the vase-painters themselves" (378, note on 1317).

⁹⁷ In his examination of vase paintings in relation to the play, Taplin comments that there is nothing in the text either to contradict or to corroborate a dragon-drawn chariot, but nevertheless, he suggests, "snakes are especially appropriate for the magical Medea" (*Pots and Plays* 119).

through rhetoricization and the active participation of spectators, anything can indeed be stageable and become a theatrical reality.

Conclusion

There could be any number of reasons why a prop or another element of stagecraft might be rhetoricized. An object might be too small to be seen if represented realistically; it might have a very simple function that gesture and language could just as easily fulfill; the object demanded by the context might be so elaborate and outlandish as to be unstageable in any realistic way; an absent, rhetoricized prop might even enhance a thematic element of the play. While we can make only reasonable conjectures as to which specific props on the Greek tragic stage might have been rhetoricized, this convention has great potential for understanding how that theater might have worked. Rhetoricization of props or other elements demands an active, participatory audience, co-creating the larger experience of the play and its theatrical reality, along with the actors, the playwright's words, and the stagecraft. Of course, any good theatrical experience involves some such collaboration, but it is the non-naturalistic theater, such as Greek tragedy, that relies most heavily on such techniques.

Some of the props identified in the catalogue in Appendix I must have been physically present on the stage. In particular, props that must *do* something physically on the stage must have been present, such as when a litter, bier, or similar object allows actors to carry a corpse. Likewise, significant costume pieces were probably present and visible because their function is often specifically to be a visual indicator of some aspect of the character's role, as when garlands indicate priests or suppliants.

The concept of rhetoricization does not imply that the Greek tragic stage did not use props at all but merely that there must have been conventions to compensate for the practical realities of that theater. Further, once those conventions exist, playwrights can use them in a variety of ways, as Euripides may have done with the tablet in *Hippolytus*. In Greek tragedy, then, “props” are not limited to objects that were physically, visibly present on the stage, nor are they limited to objects that represent them with the detailed realism that we might expect in naturalistic theater. A cast iron pot need not play a cast iron pot, to use Garner’s example.

Acceptance of the concept of rhetoricization, in the case of absent, unseen, or abstract props, points toward a new way of reading the texts of Greek tragedy. From this theatrical perspective, we should approach linguistic features such as deixis and lengthy descriptions of objects neither as literary images, which work primarily on conceptual and symbolic levels through verbal accretion, nor as literal stage directions, which tell us exactly what should be on the stage. Rather, these passages may be understood as raw material for spectators’ imaginations, as information that interacts with the physical objects on the stage and live actors’ gestures to guide the spectators’ imaginative creation of the specific props invoked. The experience is complex and cooperative, happening in real time in the theater, and it will always elude complete capture by any scholar.

Frustrating though it might be, an approach that accepts the importance of spectators’ cooperative creation and the rhetoricization of props may take us closer to understanding the Greeks’ theatrical experience. Further, an extension of the concept of rhetoricization to apply to stage action suggests even more strongly the potential

and far-reaching extent of this theatrical technique in Greek tragedy, as we will see in Chapter 3. Recreating the specific details of ancient stagecraft is ultimately as inadequate a venture as it is a futile one; seeking an understanding of the spectatorship of the Greek theater, however, may not yield much factual data about that theater, but it may lead to a fuller, more vibrant appreciation of the Greek theatrical experience.

CHAPTER 3

STAGING THE UNSTAGEABLE: BATTLES, EARTHQUAKES, AND DESTRUCTION

When it comes to the question of how Greek tragedies were staged, there are generally two extremes in critical approaches. One camp of critics insists that there must have been much spectacle that the text may or may not specifically indicate. These critics supply stage action when it seems to lag, imagine very large groups of extras for crowd scenes, and go to great lengths to find ways that the Greeks could have represented outlandish spectacles with relative realism. David Seale, for example, insists on scenes with very large crowds of non-speaking actors (mutes), and while he is right to criticize a reader's easy assumption that only specifically indicated characters are on stage, his emphasis on crowd scenes and large-scale spectacle is too strong to be readily supported by surviving evidence (Seale 16-18). In a similar example, several scholars, most notably Wolfgang Schadewaldt, have supplied an elaborate series of actions in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, proposing that Eteocles puts on full armor while on stage at lines 677 ff.⁹⁸ *Prometheus Bound* is particularly ripe for such theories of elaborate staging, with some early critics, notably

⁹⁸ Schadewaldt's discussion of this scene appears in his *Hellas und Hesperien*, volume I, 367 ff. Oliver Taplin provides a succinct summary of Schadewaldt's proposal in *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, pages 158-161.

Ulrich von Wilamowitz, suggesting that the Chorus and Prometheus somehow dropped down out of sight at the end of the play.⁹⁹

At the other extreme, mostly composed of earlier critics, the language is of far greater importance than staged spectacle, and difficult scenes are explained away as not being represented physically or visually onstage at all. The most polemic of these may be A.W. Verrall, a critic of the late nineteenth century who argued for an ironic interpretation of Euripidean tragedy. He suggested, as Ann Norris Micheline summarizes, “that large portions of dramatic reality could be consistently interpreted in a direction exactly opposite to that presented by the surface of the play” (Micheline 13). Verrallian arguments rely on many, often far-fetched, assumptions, including a divided audience composed of a few sophisticated viewers who understand the play’s irony and a mass of vulgar spectators who mistake the surface reality for the true meaning and reality of the play. Ultimately, the theory that outlandish or unexpected action is happening only in the minds of deluded characters, while sometimes tempting in analyses of poetry or fiction, is wholly unsatisfying when considered from a theatrical perspective. The live theatrical event involves the cooperation of the playwright, actors, spectators, and more: if the play is meant to mislead all but a select few of the spectators, the value and overall effect of the performance would surely suffer.

Both of these arguments stem from the problem posed by dramatic action found in extant tragedies that could not have been staged at all realistically, based on

⁹⁹ See Griffith’s discussion in his commentary on line 1080, pages 276-277, for a summary of the most prevalent theories about the staging of the cataclysm at the end of the play.

the capabilities of the Greek stage as we know them. One could understand the two extremes as essentially being a theatrical approach versus a literary approach, as I have already explained for critical approaches to props, though in this case the extreme versions of both seem unreasonable. However, these approaches are also a product of our own presuppositions about what theater is: action, spectacle, movement, sound effects, and realistic representation of action. We assume that language may be dramatic but not inherently theatrical.¹⁰⁰ If we can nudge this understanding beyond an insistence on physical and visual spectacle, we can better appreciate the Greek theater's own unique theatricality.

If some props could be absent or unseen yet still theatrically real and viable, could not the same be true for outlandish spectacle and extreme action? Extending the theory of real but unseen props to include larger issues of stagecraft and spectacle allows us to understand how very outlandish scenes, elements of stagecraft, or actions may have been very theatrically real and effective on the Greek tragic stage, even if they were in some way "unstageable." This approach emphasizes that language on the Greek stage can be inherently theatrical: when it creates a scene, event, or object, it does not collapse that phenomenon into a purely verbal or poetic phenomenon; it does not simply evoke an allusion, a mythical past, or an event from the play's back-story. Rather, truly theatrical language can create action as it happens, and it allows the spectators to create a living, theatrical concept from that rhetorical base. Thus, by widening our scope from props to action and stagecraft more generally, we can begin

¹⁰⁰ Scholarship on performative language may be an exception to this general trend, though I would argue that this is a special case and demands a specialized knowledge base and critical approach.

to appreciate more fully the Greek theater's cooperative imaginative project of creating theatrically real and powerful objects and actions through a combination of the theater's stagecraft, actors' gestures, playwrights' words, and audiences' imaginations, without insisting on either elaborate, realistic stagings or completely bare stages with only words to sustain the theater.

For the critics of Greek tragedy, the "palace-miracle scene" of the *Bacchae*, as Simon Goldhill terms the choral song in which the Chorus describes the destruction of the palace, is possibly the most popular and most energetically contested example of unstageable action (Goldhill 274). In this scene, a chorus of female followers of Dionysus work themselves into a frenzy as they sing of extreme events that they see (or imagine?) taking place in and around the palace, including both natural and supernatural phenomena. Before turning to this challenging and highly debatable scene, however, I would like to examine a few scenes from earlier plays that involve similar challenges, beginning with an example that has attracted much less attention.

Unstageable Action: The Approach of the Army in *Seven against Thebes*

Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* features a Chorus of Theban Women who, in their entrance song, fearfully cry out with each new sight or sound that indicates the approach of the attacking army. They describe the sensory details of the attack as they experience them, make exclamations and cry to the gods for help, and ask what will become of them. I would like to suggest that in this passage, the Chorus creates for the audience the reality of the attack on the city as it progresses and invites the spectators to share in their emotion and panic, to some degree.

As the play opens, the city of Thebes is under siege by Polynices and the Argive army that his father-in-law brings to support Polynices in his claim to the throne. Polynices and his brother Eteocles, both of whom have been cursed by their father Oedipus, had agreed to take turns ruling, but Eteocles had refused to yield power to his brother when his term expired, and Polynices is now attacking his homeland to insist on his right to return and rule. Eteocles begins the play with a speech to the citizens of Thebes, urging them to defend the city and pray to the gods for help, then sending them off to their stations. Next, one of the scouts Eteocles had sent to spy on the Argive army returns to make his report, and it is this scout's speech that sets up and contrasts the entry song of the Chorus that will follow it.

The report of the Scout (κατάσκοπος) is a single speech, without any dialogue with Eteocles in response to it, running about thirty lines (39-68).¹⁰¹ As Oliver Taplin summarizes, "The Scout's contribution is of the greatest simplicity. He has a single rhesis bounded by his entry and his exit.... Here the Scout's function is to give Eteocles the strategic situation. He does this in large and vivid language which finely conveys the threat of the attackers. But it is not his part to respond to the news..." (Taplin (1977) 138-139). While the Scout does give some advice to Eteocles in the form of a warning to post his best men at the gates immediately, a small editorial contribution that Taplin seems to overlook, the majority of his report is a

¹⁰¹ The full texts of the Scout's speech and of the Chorus' entry song are found at the end of this chapter, with both the Greek and my own English translation. The full passages are helpful to read in the context of my discussion, but for the sake of simplicity, I do not include them in the body of this chapter.

straightforward, past-tense messenger speech describing what the other army has been doing.

He begins with the announcement that he brings “clear” truth or news of the army (“ἤκω σαφῇ τᾱκεῖθεν ἐκ στρατοῦ φέρων,” 40) and, as a credential, identifies himself as an eyewitness of these matters (“αὐτὸς κατόπτης δ’ εἴμ’ ἐγὼ τῶν πραγμάτων,” 41). He then describes the Argives’ sacrifice of a bull, their decoration of Adrastus’ chariot, their general attitude of steely, manly bravado (“σιδηρόφρων γὰρ θυμὸς ἀνδρείᾳ φλέγων / ἔπνει,” 52-53), and their drawing of lots for gate assignments. This first section of the speech, comprising most of his news, is dominated by verbs in past tenses (aorist and imperfect) and lacks comments on his own personal reactions to or interpretations of the events he saw, with the possible exception of his comment on their determined, steely spirit. This report is clear and businesslike, as Taplin’s summary suggests, and the Scout’s references to sensory perception focus on the visual. He himself is an eyewitness (“κατόπτης”), and he ends his speech with a promise to return to his post and “keep up a loyal daytime-scout eye” (“πιστὸν ἡμεροσκόπον / ὀφθαλμὸν ἔξω,” 66-67). His only appeal to a different sense comes with a brief line that suggests both the sight and the sound of the attack, as he reinforces the immediacy of the threat to Eteocles: “for the dry-land wave/surge of the army shouts forth [βοᾷ]” (64). This comment, coming near the end of his speech and just before his exit lines, actually looks forward to the Chorus’ very different speech to follow.

Eteocles responds to the Scout’s report with a brief prayer for the city, then exits to make preparations for battle. The Chorus of Theban Women now enters at line

78 with cries of fear and exclamations of the enemy's progress. Regardless of whether this is a typical entry danced by the group or a scattered entry, with individual members or small groups of the Chorus entering from various directions at different times, the emotion and style of this entrance song (parodos) stands in stark contrast to the clear, controlled report of the Scout.¹⁰² While both the Scout and the Chorus are performing a similar basic function inasmuch as they tell the audience what the enemy (which is almost certainly not represented physically on stage) has done or is doing, the styles and ultimate effects of their accounts are vastly different. The Scout reports what he has seen in the enemy camp methodically, in the order in which the events occurred, using conjunctions, adverbs, and participles to connect his thoughts and to indicate clearly how events unfolded.¹⁰³ The Chorus, however, sings a jumbled, choppy song that skips quickly from one topic to another, without either progressing linearly through a sequence of events or building cleanly to a climax. Both the structure and the content of their speech create an entirely different theatrical experience from that of the Scout's report, and their song invites spectators into a fundamentally different mode of spectatorship.

To begin with technical elements, the verb forms, sentence structures, and meter of the choral song clearly distinguish it from the previous report. The difference

¹⁰² The question of a scattered entry has been strongly debated. Taplin (1977, p. 141-142) and Robert (*Hermes* 57) are among those who support a scattered, disorderly entry, while G.O. Hutchinson (p. 56-57) and others argue that there is no precedent for such or any need for it in order to convey the overall effect of panic.

¹⁰³ See, for example, “ταυροσφαγοῦντες” [slaughtering a bull] and “θιγγάνοντες” [touching] as examples of participles, which in this case are distinguished from the indicative verb “ὥρκωμότησαν” [they swore an oath] (43, 44, 46). Examples of conjunctions and adverbs include “γὰρ” [for/indeed], “δ[ε]” [but/and], and “ἤδη” [already/now] (41, 51, 59).

in verb tense from the Scout's report to the Chorus' song is striking and very significant. While the Scout's report could exist almost as a parenthetical or time-out from the action, consisting primarily of a recap of what has already happened and a warning of how to prepare for what is soon to come, the Chorus' song is defined by its immediacy. They panic because they see and hear things happening *now* and wonder what they should do *now*. After an initial perfect indicative expressing that the army has set out from its camp (“μεθεῖται” [it has been set loose], 79), most of the Chorus' verbs here are in the present indicative, with a few imperatives and deliberative subjunctives.¹⁰⁴ Various exclamations pepper the Chorus' song, as the women cry out “ὦ ὦ,” “φεῦ φεῦ,” or “ἔ ἔ ἔ ἔ” and, in more sustained exclamations, as they call out to the gods¹⁰⁵ (87, 136, 150). Throughout their song, they also ask questions, wondering what the gods will do and what will become of their city.¹⁰⁶ While the Scout has a clear sense of his duty and approaches the situation with enough practicality to suggest specific responses, the women of the Chorus are so at a loss that they have difficulty even deciding whether and how to pray to the gods for salvation, as their questions and deliberatives powerfully express.

This combination of present-tense verbs, sharp exclamations, and questions creates a strong sense of immediacy, of action happening in this particular dramatic

¹⁰⁴ For variations from present indicative, see, for example, the imperative “ἀλεύσατε” [keep away!] and the deliberative “ποτιπέσω” [should I fall?] (88, 95).

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, “ὦ, μάκαρες εὐδροί” [O, blessed ones on your stately thrones!] and “ὦ πότνι Ἥρα” [O mistress Hera!] (97, 152).

¹⁰⁶ For examples, see especially lines 93-94 (“Who then will save us, who then of the gods or goddesses will bring aid?”), 104-105 (“What will you do? Will you betray your own land, Ares, indigenous of old?”), and 156-157 (“What does my city suffer? What will happen to it? And what end does the god yet bring it?”).

moment. Their short, choppy sentences or phrase structures further convey their distress and inability to cope with the situation.¹⁰⁷ While most of the Scout's sentences are sustained over several lines, up to about seven lines at the longest (42-48), the Chorus rarely sustains a sentence over more than two lines, at least until line 162 when the women begin to regain control over their speech and emotions, and many of their sentence structures range from one line to a single word. Further, the entire song (again, until about line 162) is largely asyndetic, as the Chorus moves quickly from one distinct thought to another, without the fluid connections of conjunctions or other functionally similar forms.

In keeping with their emotional state and this choppy, asyndetic structure, the Chorus sings predominantly in the docmiac meter, which, as G.O. Hutchinson explains, "expresses wild emotion" (57). Indeed, as Hutchinson continues, "its effect is particularly notable here, since Aeschylean choruses often entered with spoken anapests" (57). Eva Stehle has also noted that the first passage of the song is even more irregular, in that "Even docmiacs usually form strophic pairs in tragedy, but here the chorus' initial song is not even strophic" (104). Not only, then, does the meaning of their words express their terror, but also the very sound and rhythm of the song would create an overall impression of their disordered and overwhelming panic. They are, on one level, unable to offer a ritually correct prayer and, on another level, unable

¹⁰⁷ I realize that it is difficult to make specific claims about sentence length for Greek texts, which usually have no punctuation marks in their original texts. My point, though, is that in the choral song, the basic length of a complete thought or grammatical unit is shorter than usual. I will use the word "sentence" in this discussion for the sake of simplicity, but I understand it as a stand-in for the more nebulous sense of a grammatically and/or logically complete, independent clause or structure.

to perform a *parodos* as a chorus normally should.¹⁰⁸ Collectively, these technical elements of the song, including verb forms, sentence structures and lengths, and meter create a sense of an emergency so great as to overthrow the usual structures of behavior, speech, and ritual. This choral song insists on the immediacy of the enemy's attack, and the Chorus' resulting fear, panic, and almost totally paralyzing *aporia* becomes a theatrically appropriate and meaningful response.

The content of the Chorus' song clearly contributes to the expression of their extreme emotion, and one particularly notable element of this content heightens the power of that emotion, both in its intensity and in its degree of communicability to the audience. While the Scout's report is mostly a straightforward report of what he has seen, the Chorus' song includes many appeals to sensory perception, as new sights and sounds continually assail the women and intensify their fear. Immediately following their first exclamation of their sufferings, the women vividly describe their perception of the enemy's approach:

The army, having left its camp, has been set loose;
 this huge horse throng gushes forth at a run;
 the dust *visible* [φανεῖσ'] in the air persuades me,
 a *voiceless* [ἄναυδος] but clear and true messenger.
 The soil <of my land>¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Stehle offers a convincing reading of this song as the Chorus' inability to sustain appropriate, good-omened speech until near the end of the song, at which point Eteocles interrupts them.

¹⁰⁹ "The soil of my land" is Sommerstein's translation and rendering of a corruption in the text (he supplies "ἐλεδέμας" as line 83). The remainder of this quotation is my own translation.

hoof-resounding, brings the *noise/shout* [βοάν] near to my ear.

It flies and it *roars* [βρέμει], just like an unconquerable

torrent dashing down a mountain. (79-86)

The women see the dust thrown up by galloping horses and hear the drumming of hooves as the army draws near. These words of perception in this passage (italicized above), along with the descriptive imagery, allow the Chorus both to describe the attack as they see and hear it and to help the audience to imagine it more clearly. This is a prime example of what Bert States calls “rhetorical scenery” (States 54).

In *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater*, States proposes that many plays performed in a mostly bare or neutral space, particularly before the rise of realism and naturalism, have traditionally relied on language and metaphor to create their worlds, and these words then inflect everything that the audience might see on the stage. He explains, “The very thickness of Shakespeare’s world is derived from the way in which poetry triumphs over neutral space” (56). Certainly there may be set pieces, costumes, and props on the stage, but the language of the play, and perhaps also the actors’ gestures, can inflect those pieces of stagecraft with further meaning and vitality. In States’s words, “...the character creates a verbal world that bathes what we see before us in its quality” (States 57).

While it is always possible for an actor to mime an object or action or for metaphorical language to supplement a performance’s stagecraft, it is in the case of action that is in some way unstageable, particularly of action that is too big and too spectacular to stage with anything like completeness or realism, that this phenomenon truly fulfills its potential. It is in these moments that an actor can use language and

gesture to create for the audience that unstageable action with its full sense of presence and immediacy. In the case of *Seven against Thebes*, the Chorus' appeals to sensory perception are particularly effective in making the enemy's attack theatrically real and present. This passage could even be an experiment by Aeschylus in how to represent a battle on stage. He chooses here not to bring a messenger on stage to describe the action after the fact, as Euripides does in *Children of Heracles*,¹¹⁰ for example, nor does he locate the onstage action in a distinctly separate place or time than the offstage battle, as many other tragedies do.¹¹¹ Rather, he stages the response of a group of women in the acropolis of the city while it is under attack. The setting is thus sufficiently removed that the armies themselves need not be on stage, yet the Chorus is still experiencing the sights, sounds, and emotions of the battle as it takes place all around them.

As the song progresses, the Chorus continues to cry out to the gods for help and to exclaim and describe the specific sights and sounds they perceive. Their direct references to their perception of the attack begin as early as the fourth line of their song, with the first few lines being related but less explicit, and these continue to weave in and out of the Chorus' song. A few particularly vivid examples come near the middle of the song: as the enemy draws nearer, the Chorus' descriptions of what they hear grow more detailed:

¹¹⁰ See lines 784-891, when the Messenger reports what happened in the battle (taking place nearby but off stage) when Iolaus arrived and miraculously became a young, powerful warrior again.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Aeschylus' *Persians*, which also uses a Messenger to report the outcome of the campaign but sets the action of the play itself in Persia, far away from the battles.

The Argives are surrounding the city-buildings
of Cadmus, and fear of their warlike weapons
<throws us into confusion>,¹¹² and the bridles through the jaws
of the horses whine slaughter. (120-124)

A little later, they again seem to be hearing subtler noises and to consider the army to be closer than before:

I hear the noise of the chariots around the city—
O Mistress Hera!
The joints of the heavy-laden axles rattle/shriek—
Dear Artemis!
The air goes mad, shaken by battle! (151-155)

The whine of the bridles in the horses' mouths and the rattle of the chariots' axle-joints are particularly powerful for their detail. Their specificity helps to create a clearer sense of what is happening beyond the city walls, and though, as Thalmann notes, the performance probably did not include sound effects to simulate this attack, the Chorus is providing the spectators with ample details for them to imagine the action (Thalmann 89). Furthermore, the army now seems to be closer to the city, close enough, that is, for the Chorus to hear those particular sounds and not simply the overwhelming thunder of the horses' hooves or the indistinct roar of the approach.

Through the course of the Chorus' song, therefore, the enemy troops come ever closer to the city of Thebes itself, and the Chorus' descriptions of what they perceive of the army become increasingly detailed to reflect the nearness of the enemy

¹¹² Sommersteins' translation of "θρόσσει," which he accepts from Ritschl.

and the urgency of the situation. There is a general progression here, beginning with the clouds of dust, drumming of hooves, and general roar of the army (81, 84, 85). Next, they hear shouting and see a glint of white shields (89, 90-91). Later, they hear crashes of shields and spears (100, 103); see a wave of the soldiers' helmet-crests (101); hear the whine of bridles (123-124); hear the noise of chariots (151); and hear the rattle of the chariots' axle-joints (153). Finally, just before they regain control of their emotions and speech in order to make a more auspicious prayer, they hear the bombardment of stones the enemy is throwing at the battlement, as well as a clashing of bronze-bound shields at the very gates of the city (159, 161).

The progression of the sights and sounds through the course of this song reinforces the immediacy and the reality of the attack on Thebes. The passage creates a sense that this action is unfolding as the Chorus sings, and as the audience watches, even if that action is located just off stage. In fact, this effect could be similar to that which Gwilym Jones proposes for the original production of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Jones provides evidence for her claim that *Julius Caesar* was first play performed at the Globe Theatre at its opening in 1599 and further suggests that the play reveals Shakespeare showing off the new theater's capacity for spectacle. One particular effect that *Julius Caesar* uses is a new variation in the volume of flourishes and battle calls:

The battle scenes of Act 5 of *Julius Caesar* as read in the stage directions show a sensitivity for distance which had not been evident in the playwright's earlier work. A Renaissance trumpet could be sounded only at one loud volume; in order to create the illusion of

distant battles, there needs to be some kind of backstage structure to dilute the sound. Only in *Julius Caesar* does Shakespeare begin to write directions such as “Low alarums” (e.g. 5.5.23). *Julius Caesar* marks the beginning of Shakespeare’s variations of sound distance—the audience, perhaps for the first time, experienced their battles in a multi-dimensional soundscape—and it is likely that the structure of the Globe playhouse is crucial in this development. (Jones 7-8)

While I would not suggest that Aeschylus was using actual sound effects as Shakespeare does, I do consider that the experience for the spectators could be similar. In each case, the ultimate purpose of the appeal to sense perception (through the Chorus’ developing report of what they see and hear or through trumpet flourishes with increasing volume) is to bring offstage battle and tumult into the stage action and the audience’s spectatorial experience. The element of progression in each example is the particularly distinctive quality of the technique, and it could be, in each case, an experiment in new methods of bringing such action into full theatrical vitality.

In *Engaging Audiences*, his recent book applying cognitive science to theater, Bruce McConachie explores the concept of “mind-reading,” the process by which spectators “‘read the minds’ of actor/characters, ...intuit their beliefs, intentions, and emotions by watching their motor actions” (65). McConachie bases the mechanism of this process on the mirror neuron system and terms it “empathy,” suggesting that as a spectator watches an actor/character, the neurons that she would use to perform the same action herself are activated, thus in some way bridging the divide between the

spectator and the actor/character.¹¹³ Furthermore, McConachie considers this process as necessary, and perhaps even automatic, for a spectator making meaning of a performance. Certainly various individual spectators will engage with characters' emotions to varying degrees, but McConachie's explanation of this process suggests that any spectator paying attention to the performance will automatically engage in those emotions to some extent, simply because our brains do that as a matter of course when identifying emotions, intentions, and actions in others. While the automatic portion of emotional engagement must be largely subconscious and is likely not very powerful, it nevertheless lays the groundwork for communication and transference between actor/characters and spectators.¹¹⁴

There has traditionally been an argument surrounding the element of spectacle in Aeschylus. Some critics have pointed to the Ghost of Darius in *Persians* or the (possible) flying vehicles and great cataclysm in *Prometheus Bound* to support the view expressed in his *Life* that Aeschylus was distinctive for his use of spectacle. Others, however, have considered such lavish spectacle with insufficient motivation to be the mark of an inferior dramatist and have striven to read his plays in such a way as

¹¹³ While I accept McConachie's explanation of this process, though, I would take issue with his use of the term "empathy" here, as it is loaded with a long history of philosophical debate and everyday usage that hinders such a drastic redefinition of the word.

¹¹⁴ For more on these issues, see Part One of my Introduction, especially the sections "Bodily Presence and Communication" and "Imaginative Participation," pages 8-18. In particular, projection-identification, as explained by Edgar Morin, should be an important component of the imaginative seeing in the theater that I am proposing. Since humans tend to project their own feelings and memories onto the world and take affective qualities from the world into themselves as they perceive, theater can use a variety of techniques, such as perceptual language, in order to encourage spectators to engage in this process more powerfully than usual.

to diminish the spectacle needed for the productions. Oliver Taplin, for example, claims: “that gratuitous spectacle is the resort of a poor playwright who is at a loss for true dramatic material, and that Aeschylus, as a great theatrical artist, integrates the visual aspects of the drama into the work as a whole. This is not the case, it seems, in *Prom[etheus]* as we have it” (Taplin (1977) 260). By Taplin’s reasoning, we have two basic alternatives: since tradition has long since affirmed that Aeschylus is indeed a great dramatist, either the *Prometheus* was not written by him at all, or the play was heavily revised by a later dramatist, who added the scenes and elements that Taplin considers “gratuitous spectacle.” What the Chorus’ entry song in *Seven against Thebes* shows us, I contend, is how Aeschylus could have been celebrated for his use of powerful, breathtaking spectacle in antiquity without our being forced to dream up elaborate machinery and stage effects that seem inconsistent with what we know of the fifth-century Greek stage and its capabilities.

In his study of *Seven against Thebes*, William Thalmann cites the *Life of Aeschylus* as he explains Aeschylus’ use of spectacle:

Aeschylus always made striking use of the possibilities afforded by theatrical production. The *Vita* in the Medicean manuscript makes a valuable statement about his purpose: that ‘he used spectacles and plots with a view towards an awe-inspiring impact (πρὸς ἑκπληξιν τερατώδη¹¹⁵) rather than for the sake of illusion (μᾶλλον ἢ πρὸς ἀπάτην).’ The word ἑκπληξιν is a strong one. It denotes the amazement

¹¹⁵ Literally, “towards a portentous/prodigious [τερατώδη] passion [ἑκπληξιν].”

caused by the onrush of any strong feeling—love, surprise, delight, or terror. (Thalmann 82-83)

Based on the preceding analysis of the Chorus' entry song, I would argue that the *Life* is not necessarily claiming that Aeschylus used "gratuitous" spectacle with elaborate machinery and physical representations, but rather that his stagings thrust a strong emotional impact on spectators even if the action were not represented in any "realistic" (or "illusory" or, as ἀπάτην literally means, "deceptive") way. The Chorus of Theban Women effectively creates the sights and sounds of an approaching enemy army, along with their response of terror and disordered panic, yet the army itself need never appear on stage. The battle is rendered theatrically real, vital, and immediate simply through the Chorus' words and movement,¹¹⁶ and for an attentive and accepting spectator, the emotional power of the scene could be overwhelming.¹¹⁷ The potential for unseen but theatrically real action thus resolves an unnecessary critical conflict surrounding Aeschylean spectacle, providing a technique appropriate both to the Greek stage and to the reported "awe-inspiring" effects.

In *Seven against Thebes*, the account of the unfolding but unstaged attack is provided by the Chorus, rather than by some sort of messenger or a single

¹¹⁶ I have said little about the Chorus' movement in this discussion. While several critics have offered interesting interpretations of what this movement may have been, ultimately we cannot know how they moved. They may have entered together or scattered; they may have moved methodically up and down a row of statues (Thalmann 88ff.); they may have danced in any number of potential configurations. I would prefer not to make a specific claim about their movement, but rather simply to assume that whatever that movement was, it in some way supported the emotional and circumstantial context of the song, as well as the technical elements of the language, such as the docmiacs.

¹¹⁷ Such a scene would be particularly powerful for a fifth-century Greek audience, for whom attacks and sieges on cities were very real, and common, threats.

actor/character. Some of the advantages of the use of the Chorus for this creation of unseen spectacle are natural and clear: a group of people can more easily create a sense of a strong emotion (here, fear or panic) than can a single person, and such emotion tends to be more “contagious” to other people when felt and expressed by a group. Even without the facial expressions that masks hide, the Chorus can communicate emotion and intentional action to the audience through gestures, and spectators may then, further, reinforce those emotions through contagion among themselves. If the Chorus panics, the spectators might feel some degree of panic themselves.¹¹⁸

The chorus has long been of particular interest to scholars, who offer various explanations of its distinct role in the performance. Certainly the chorus contributes to the visual spectacle and the aural performance, through its dance and song, as well as its sheer size and, likely, eye-catching costumes. On a deeper level, it may roughly stand in for the audience and guide the audience’s reactions to the stage action, as such August Wilhelm von Schlegel and his critical descendents have suggested.¹¹⁹ The chorus could also serve as the representative of the general citizenry and question, directly or indirectly, how the characters’ actions affect the overall public welfare, as many have suggested for the Chorus in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, for example. Various similar explanations of the role and effect of the chorus in Greek tragic performance have been proposed, though a full understanding and appreciation of the Greek chorus

¹¹⁸ See pages 15-18 of my Introduction for more on emotional contagion.

¹¹⁹ In his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, Schlegel writes: “In a word, the Chorus is the ideal spectator. It mitigates the impression of a heart-rending or moving story, while it conveys to the actual spectator a lyrical and musical expression of his own emotions, and elevates him to the region of contemplation” (505).

seems to remain beyond us, with our modern perspective and theatrical experience. Nevertheless, we have some sense of the distinctive significance of the chorus, and it seems appropriate that it is the Chorus in the *Seven* that creates the offstage action and the onstage response to it.

The Fall of Heracles and His House

Euripides' *Heracles* uses the Chorus, here composed of old men of Thebes, to create the destruction of the house of Heracles in a way similar to the Chorus' evocation of the enemy's attack in *Seven against Thebes*. In contrast to the *Seven*, however, *Heracles* also uses a preparatory speech from the goddess Lyssa, a Messenger's speech after the action, and scattered cries from the character Amphitryon during the action as supplements to the Chorus' account of the unstageable action.

In *Heracles*, Lycus, usurper to the Theban throne, is going to kill Heracles' children, his wife, Megara, and his father, Amphitryon, for fear that they would someday kill him in retribution for his murder of Megara's father, Creon. When Heracles returns, all seems to be well, as he can now protect his family from the threat. At this point, however, Iris and Lyssa descend with orders from Hera to drive him to madness and to the slaughter of his own children. Lyssa is hesitant to destroy this hero, but she relents and describes what she will do:

Neither is the sea, groaning with waves, so turbulent
nor the shaking of the earth or the sting of a thunderbolt, blowing forth
anguish,

as the course I will make into the chest of Heracles.

I will both break his roof into pieces and throw his house onto him,
having first killed his children. And the one killing will not know
that he has killed the children he begot, until he breaks away from my
madness. (861-866)

The Scout's report in *Seven against Thebes* sets the stage for the Chorus' entrance song by concisely explaining what has happened in the enemy camp and predicting the imminent attack. In *Heracles*, Lyssa's description of how she will overcome Heracles fills a similar function by setting up the next major action of the play, yet her speech is more detailed in its predictions than is the Scout's. Lyssa provides important pieces of information that will help the audience understand what happens next, particularly if the staging of it might be ambiguous on its own.

Delusion can be difficult to identify and interpret, and the meaning of a character's action, as well as the degree of the character's responsibility for that action, can vary widely. Such characters as Ajax, Orestes, and Pentheus, as well as Heracles, have long been the subject of controversy over the nature and degree of their madness. Do the characters truly go mad? What is the cause of their madness? Are they responsible for actions they perform while mad? In *Heracles*, in contrast to *Ajax* and *Orestes*, for example, the onset of madness abruptly interrupts the progression of a triumphant resolution to the threat against Heracles' family. Moments after he has provided *sotêria* (salvation) for his family and killed the tyrant Lycus, Heracles becomes the agent of their utter destruction, through the divinely induced madness,

and indeed, it is this abrupt change that leads some critics to explain the divine intervention otherwise.

For those who approach it from a literary perspective, the play seems to fall into two distinct parts, without the unity traditionally demanded for dramas. Thalia Papadopoulou summarizes Ulrich von Wilamowitz's influential view of Heracles' madness and those that grew from it, explaining his interpretation as emerging from this concern for unity:

The question of unity was essential to Wilamowitz, and one way to defend it was his theory that Heracles does not suddenly go mad but already shows signs of madness on his first appearance on stage. The emerging science of psychology during the nineteenth century probably influenced the 'megalomaniac' theory, according to which the strains of the labours were the cause of Heracles' madness. (2)

It is true that Heracles' actions are consistent with his character to some extent, as his celebrated strength, his weapons, and his tendency to use his weapons and brute strength to solve problems certainly contribute his murderous rampage. However, while critics, particularly those who approach the play as a literary text, could argue over exactly how delusion functions and whether Heracles is truly under the control of Lyssa here,¹²⁰ Lyssa's clear declaration that she will cast madness upon him and that he will not know he is killing his children should be convincing to an audience in the midst of the performance, particularly to an audience that has just witnessed his

¹²⁰ For a concise summary of the major arguments along these lines, see pp. 2-3 of Thalia Papadopoulou's *Heracles and Euripidean Tragedy* (2005).

poignant reunion with his family. As Karelisa Hartigan argues, the physical presence of Iris and Lyssa emphasizes “the external nature of Herakles’ punishment. His madness is not a sickness that grows from within, resulting from some crime or deed he has done, nor is it an aspect of his character which is just now with divine assistance being revealed” (127).¹²¹ His attack on his family does implement some of the potentials already present in his character, and indeed he has just killed Lycus in retribution for his threats, but Lyssa’s presence shows that it is the divine intervention and not some inner psychological disorder that directs his aggression toward his family.¹²²

Lyssa’s description also provides more specific information that should clarify exactly what the coming events will be. For the Greeks, the word “house” often refers not to a physical structure but to a family line, as common phrases such as “the house of Atreus” clearly show. Is it not possible, then, that the destruction of the house of Heracles is purely metaphorical, a way of expressing the destruction of his family line

¹²¹ In her footnote 16, page 133, Hartigan also cites a few of the prominent, divergent arguments, as well as a few scholars whose interpretations are in line with her own. A prime example of a different view would be J.C. Kamerbeek’s “Unity and Meaning of Euripides’ *Heracles*,” in *Mnemosyne* 19 (1966): 1-16. See especially pp. 14-15. Kamerbeek asks, “Is there anything phantastic in the assumption that, on the psychological level, the poet meant us to understand Heracles’ madness as the violent reaction to the overstrain of a burdensome life?” (14).

¹²² Ajax is the most apt comparison here. In Sophocles’ play, Ajax was still sane and clear-minded when he decided to go on a murderous rampage; the madness Athena has imposed on him does not spur him to that action but rather clouds his eyes so that he believes the animals he is slaughtering are actually the leaders of the Greek army. Similarly, as Papadopoulou concludes her discussion of Heracles’ madness, “Madness does not impose upon Heracles an action which is entirely alien to his normal activity; he follows his familiar course of action throughout his mad fit, the only difference being that he is made to misperceive reality around him” (128). His anger and aggression are already there, but Lyssa clouds his vision and redirects those impulses.

through the murder of his children? On its own, a reference to the destruction of the “house of Heracles” could very well mean just this, but in this case, Lyssa’s description of what she will do clarifies that her ruin of Heracles will involve both the murder of his children by his own hand and the literal destruction of his house: “I will both break his roof [μέλαθρα] into pieces and throw his house [δόμους] onto him, / having first [πρῶτον] killed his children [τέκν’]” (864-865). Lyssa distinguishes between her destruction of the house and the killing of Heracles’ children, emphasizing that these are distinct events, separated in time, as indicated by “first” [πρῶτον]. In further support of a literal, or mixed literal and metaphorical, understanding of “house” here, she specifies that she will cast down the house *onto* him [“ἐπεμβάλῳ,” 864]. The prefix ἐπε- [on/onto] does not conclusively prove that the physical house crashes down, but Lyssa’s phrasing does suggest the image of a literal house collapse with a physical impact on someone or something, and this preparatory statement, coupled with later descriptions, could help the audience to understand a crude or abstract stagecraft effect as representing a more complete destruction.

Just as the Chorus creates the theatrical reality of the enemy’s attack in the *Seven against Thebes*, the Chorus and the voice of Amphitryon (presumably off stage) combine here to create the physical destruction of the house and to narrate the action taking place off stage, inside the house. The Chorus laments the murder of the children that they now know is coming, and Amphitryon cries out from inside the house with sharp, relatively inarticulate exclamations such as “ὦ στέγαι” [O, the house/roof!] (888). The combination of the Chorus’ cries of grief and anticipation with Amphitryon’s exclamations creates a growing sense of the tension and the progressing

crisis in the house. The Chorus' cries develop through this passage, from future-tense laments for what *will* be¹²³ to present-tense descriptions of what is happening now, as when they sing that the drumless dance begins (889) or that Heracles is now hunting down his children: "He hunts [κυναγετεῖ] the pursuit of his children! In no way will Lyssa inspire a Bacchic frenzy [Βακχεύσει] in the house in vain!" (896-897). This turmoil lasts for about 35 lines (875-909), including the Chorus' initial song anticipating the ruin Lyssa has promised.

A likely climax of this excitement and tension comes with the Chorus' exclamation about the shaking of the house:

ἰδοὺ ἰδοὺ,

θύελλα σείει δῶμα, συμπίπτει στέγη.

ἦ ἦ·

τί δρᾷς, ὦ Διὸς παῖ, μέλαθρῳ; (904-907)

[Look, look! / A hurricane/storm shakes the house—the roof falls in! /

Ah, ah! What are you doing, O son of Zeus, in the house/roof?]

Unlike the Chorus of Theban Women in *Seven against Thebes*, this Chorus rarely speaks in the first person, likely because they themselves are not in direct danger. They are sympathetic to Heracles and his family, but they have heard Lyssa's declaration and know what is to come and that they cannot change it. Being in a position of knowledge superior to that of the other characters, they use both present and future verb tenses to describe and lament the unfolding ruin. At this point in the

¹²³ See, for example, line 885: "And soon the children will breathe their last by their father's hand" or lines 886-888: "O Zeus, at once the raging mad, flesh-eating, unjust goddesses of vengeance will lay flat your son, childless, with their evils!"

action, however, their language more closely resembles that of the Chorus of the *Seven*: these four lines include imperatives to look, a present-tense description of the devastation as it happens, the inarticulate cries of “ah, ah,” and a question that suggests that their knowledge is incomplete. The Chorus knows basically what will happen, but their language emphasizes that they are still experiencing the action as it progresses in the moment, and they, with Amphitryon, create the sense of immediacy and progression for the audience.

The function of the Chorus’ song, with Amphitryon’s interjections, is to provide the audience with some experience of the immediate, unfolding disaster as it happens just off stage. The details of what is happening remain unclear, as the Chorus’ knowledge is incomplete and Amphitryon’s cries are inarticulate. The function of the following scene, therefore, is to supply the specific details of that offstage action in the past tense, through the report of the Messenger (Ἐξαγγελος). When the Messenger first arrives, the Chorus is already lamenting and already knows that disaster has struck. They ask, however, that the Messenger clarify the details for them: “How do you make known the grief-causing destruction, destruction of the father?” (918-919). The Messenger’s report, then, is a typical messenger speech with a straightforward, sequential report in the past tense explaining what happened off stage (922-1015). This speech does not create the immediacy and excitement of the previous scene, but it does provide more information for the spectators to interpret whatever visual representation they see on the stage both at this point and after the interior scene is revealed, probably by the *ekkyklêma*, around line 1031.

The most significant piece of information here is the further support for understanding the collapse of the house as a literal one. When he recounts how Athena finally stopped Heracles' rampage, the Messenger explains: "He falls [πίτνει, historical present] to the ground, having struck his back against a pillar [κίονα], which from the falling [πεσῆωσι] of the roof [στέγης], broken in two, was lying on the foundations" (1006-1008). If there were any doubt that the physical house has in some way broken apart in a storm or earthquake, this description should clarify that the pillar to which Heracles has been bound had already fallen before Athena struck him with the rock. If the stagecraft of the scene has changed in some abstract, unclear way to represent the physical damage to the house, the information provided by Lyssa, the Chorus, Amphytrion, and now the Messenger should help the audience know how to read that visual cue.

Regardless of the extent to which the stagecraft creates the destruction visually, the communication of this "unstageable," spectacular action to the audience should be very clear by the time the interior scene is revealed, particularly because the Chorus is a trustworthy source of information. Unlike the women of the Chorus in the *Seven against Thebes*, this Chorus of Theban Elders laments for the destruction without ever panicking. There is no indication whatsoever that the Elders themselves might be delusional, as some could argue for the women of the *Seven*, who might be considered too overcome by fear to be in their right minds. There is a mention of a Bacchic frenzy, but it is the frenzy that Lyssa is sending through the house (see lines 996-997), not a frenzy that extends to those outside. This Chorus' language is more controlled than that of the Chorus in the *Seven*, and while I would argue that both

choruses create theatrically real, immediate, unfolding action, the Chorus of the *Heracles* is most clearly beyond suspicion of delusion or frenzy.

Theatrically, this sequence in *Heracles* (843-1015) is structured in such a way as first to prepare the audience to understand the coming action, then to allow the audience to experience the tension and excitement of the action as it happens, and finally to provide a fuller description of the completed action to reinforce exactly what has happened and to ensure that the audience is “reading” both the language and the stagecraft correctly. This is particularly important in *Heracles* because while many Greek tragedies feature offstage death or murder scenes, some of which even involve exclamations from within similar to those of *Amphitryon*, this scene departs from the typical models for offstage deaths by including some action that manifests itself in front of the closed doors of the house. This scene, therefore, shares with the scene in *Seven against Thebes* the need to create a sense of immediacy and progression in the action, as well as the need to evoke a sense of presence, of action happening “right there” in the world of the play. *Heracles* then has the additional task of helping the audience interpret some kind of physical change that is understood to happen *on* the stage and may be represented in some abstract way.

In his discussion of staging possibilities for the flying Chorus in *Prometheus Bound*, Oliver Taplin argues for an absolute choice between either total realism in the representation of their flight or a complete lack of representational staging:

There seems little point in half measures: either there should be a proper attempt at spectacular illusion, or it may as well be entirely left to the words. It is implausible, for example, to bring on the ‘flying’

Oceanids in wheeled vehicle(s) running on a solid surface. Trundling on wheels only contradicts the illusion of flying, and rather than this the vehicle(s) should be abandoned. Nor is it plausible to split the chorus up, and have a representative or two flown on while the rest enter on foot; for if the entry is acceptable with some on foot then it is acceptable with all on foot. If any attempt is to be made at illusion, then surely the whole chorus should actually travel through the air. (Taplin (1977) 253)

What the example of *Heracles* proves, I would argue, is that Taplin's demand for one extreme or the other is unnecessary. In *Heracles*, the outlandish, "unstageable" action is dramatically and theatrically real, and the play carefully leads the audience to a proper understanding of that action.

Stagecraft, then, can still represent destruction or other unstageable action, such as a Chorus of Oceanids in flying vehicles, in some way without showing that action realistically, as long as the language of the play (and possibly also the actors' gestures and other cues for which we do not have concrete evidence) tells the audience how to "read" the abstract or non-illusory effect. As a particularly clear example of this kind of communication to the audience, *Heracles* may serve, for the sake of scholarly investigation, as a prototype for such scenes and their presentations to audiences, opening the possibility that other scenes in Greek tragedy could have functioned in a similar way, even if their literary texts do not include quite as many reiterations of what is happening and how to "read" it.

Did the Earth Quake? The “Palace-Miracle” Scene in *Bacchae*

The destruction of Heracles’ house in *Heracles* could be the key to understanding Euripides’ later earthquake scene in *Bacchae*, which has provoked much critical controversy. In a critique of Simon Goldhill’s *Reading Greek Tragedy*, David Wiles gestures toward *Heracles* as a possible approach to this problematic scene, but he does not pursue the comparison beyond a brief summary of how knowledge of whether the *skênê* could actually collapse would affect the audience’s interpretation of whatever stage effect occurs here:

In order to reconstruct the meanings which the ‘palace-miracle’ scene in *The Bacchae* held for the first Athenian audience, we would need to know what happened in the *Herakles*.... If the *skênê* collapsed in the *Herakles*, the audience would have known that stage sets can tumble, and a stable *skênê* in *The Bacchae* would enable the audience to perceive the Chorus as deluded. On the other hand, if the audience of the *Herakles* merely imagined a falling palace, an audience of *The Bacchae* which saw the palace physically falling would have seen a theatrical code disrupted,¹²⁴ and their confidence in the theatrical illusion would be disturbed.... (144)

While it is true that we have no way of knowing whether the *skênê* actually collapsed in *Heracles*, I have argued that the evidence does at least support the claim that the

¹²⁴ Here, I would add that about ten years intervened between the production of *Heracles* (ca. 416 BC) and that of *Bacchae* (most likely 405 BC). In this brief explanation, Wiles omits the possibility that if the *skênê* did not fall in *Heracles*, technology might have progressed to allow for more of an effect ten years later, and presumably, an audience would be surprised but also willing to accept such a change.

house, that is, the dramatic reality that the *skênê* is understood to represent, is understood to collapse or break apart in some way. Perhaps then, the *Heracles* scene can serve as a model for studying this scene of *Bacchae*, even without knowledge of whether the *skênê* itself came down during the performance.¹²⁵

Although the Chorus in *Bacchae* is experiencing and narrating the same basic event as does the Chorus of *Heracles*, this Chorus of Bacchantes may itself be more similar to the Chorus of Theban Women in *Seven against Thebes*. Both of these choruses are composed of women, and both could be understood as being deluded or otherwise overcome by emotion. The Chorus of Theban Women, as we have seen, has limited control over language, and their attempts to pray to the gods appropriately are interrupted time and again by exclamations of fear or of new sights or sounds. This Chorus is terrified and panic-stricken by the approach of the enemy army, and while I have argued that the sights and sounds they describe are certainly real in a dramatic and theatrical sense, their account is nevertheless colored by their emotional state. This emotion naturally makes their song and the action they describe even more immediate and powerful for the audience, but it does leave open a door for a more skeptical critic to claim that the women are deluded by their fear into imagining an attack that is not actually happening.

Similarly, the Chorus of Bacchantes in *Bacchae* are women, and additionally, as Richard Seaford summarizes the common point, “characteristic of the adherent of

¹²⁵ For the complete text of this scene, both the Greek and my own translation of lines 576-603, see the appendix at the end of this chapter.

D[ionysus] is to see things which others do not see” (198).¹²⁶ Furthermore, while these women of the Chorus may seem to be in their right minds for most of the play, this particular scene shows them in a much-elevated state of emotion and reveling as they respond to the voice of Dionysus. In fact, Seaford points out that the use of the term “maenads” to refer to the Chorus in line 601 “is the only place in the play in which a word beginning μαιν- (mad) describes the chorus (this is in sharp contrast with the Theban ‘maenads’ and Pentheus)” (199). What, then, are we to make of the spectacular and supernatural events that they describe? Is the house shaken apart by an earthquake, as lines 586-593 suggest? Does lightning kindle a fire on Semele’s tomb (596-599)?

Both *Seven against Thebes* and *Heracles* serve as theatrical precedents for this “palace-miracle” scene, and doubtless there were other scenes in tragedies that have not survived that featured similar roles for a chorus or similar presentations of unstageable action. Of course, any speculation about lost plays or even about surviving fragments and testimonia¹²⁷ is problematic, if not totally beyond any critical usefulness in this case. Thus, although we have no way of knowing to what extent these two plays are representative of others or how they might fit into the larger picture of how such scenes function in Greek tragedy, the limitations of our corpus bring the connections between them to the forefront, and the scene of *Bacchae*

¹²⁶ Agave is a prime example of this phenomenon, as she kills her son while firmly believing that she is ripping apart a lion cub.

¹²⁷ In his commentary on *Heracles*, Godfrey W. Bond lists some instances of earthquakes in tragedy: “A similar earthquake occurs just off-stage in *Ba.* 585, 587f., 591f. There are other earthquakes at *Erechth.* *NFE* 65.48ff. (note 51 συμπίπτει στέγη), *A. PV* 1080ff., *A. fr.* 58N = 76M (*Edon.*)... *Tro.* 1295ff., the burning of Troy, may also be compared” (303).

emerges as an innovative combination of techniques and qualities found in each of these previous examples.

From *Seven against Thebes*, and possibly other plays that might have featured a similar choral song, *Bacchae*'s "palace-miracle" scene takes a female chorus in the throes of intense emotion. The technical elements of this choral song are also strongly reminiscent of those of the Chorus' entry song in *Seven*. As in the earlier example, the Chorus of Bacchantes speaks in the present and future tenses, with additional imperatives and one-word exclamations scattered throughout their speech. Their description of the falling stone lintels exemplifies this pattern:

—Ah, Ah! [ἄ ἄ]

Soon the house of Pentheus

will be shaken apart [διατινάσσεται, future] into collapse.

Dionysus is in the house;

worship [σέβετε, imperative] him! O, we worship him!

Look [ἴδετε, imperative] at these stone wedges on the columns

falling apart [διάδρομα]! Bromios raises a shout [ἀλαλάσσεται, present]

inside this house. (586-593)

Their frenzied song thus incorporates technical elements similar to those of *Seven*'s entry song, including exclamations (such as "ἄ ἄ" in lines 586 and 596), imperatives (including "ἴδετε" in line 591 and "δίκετε" in line 600), present and future verb tenses, and very short sentence units.

The most significant difference in syntactical technicalities between these two passages is that the Chorus of *Bacchae* does not feature the deliberatives and questions

about what to do and what will happen to them that characterize *Seven*'s choral entry. These women, however, do not have the same degree of fear for their own personal safety as do the Theban women. In fact, while the Theban women feel completely terrified for themselves and the city, these Bacchantes are worshippers of Dionysus, and in the context of Pentheus' attitude, they have good reason to feel more vindicated than threatened by the god's epiphany. Their language and actions do suggest a degree of fear or uneasiness about the supernatural events,¹²⁸ and when Dionysus emerges from the palace, his instruction to them to take courage and stop trembling confirms that there is some fear mixed with their euphoria (604-607). Nevertheless, they respond to Dionysus' initial calls to them by asking him to come into their midst (582-584), and they continue to worship him throughout the scene. This blend of ecstatic worship with a little fear thus explains the technicalities of the passage's language, with its imperatives, present and future verb tenses, and short sentence units, to indicate high emotion and a degree of fear, yet with a lack of deliberatives and a smaller number of questions as compared to the passage of *Seven against Thebes*, which reflects the Bacchantes' lower degree of concern for personal safety.

The portion of the *Bacchae* passage that describes the earthquake and the fire, whether or not those events are visible on the stage, also employs words of perception, just as the Theban women's descriptions of the enemy's approach do. After Dionysus' voice calls for an earthquake, the Chorus cries out to look [ἴδετε] at the stone wedges,

¹²⁸ For example, their exclamations about the fire on Semele's tomb could easily reflect a combination of ecstasy and fear (596-603).

and after Dionysus calls for lightning to burn up the palace, the Chorus again uses perceptual language as they look for the fire on Semele's tomb:

Ah, ah,
do you not see [λεύσσεις], nor perceive [αὐγάζει]
the fire, around this sacred tomb of Semele,
whom once the lightning flame
of Zeus left lightning-struck? (596-599)

The use of perceptual language is not nearly as pervasive in the *Bacchae* passage as in that of *Seven against Thebes*, but this passage is also much shorter, and the events are more discrete.

The “palace-miracle” scene of *Bacchae* thus invokes several of the technical elements that Aeschylus had already used in *Seven against Thebes* to enable his Chorus of Theban Women to make a large-scale, “unstageable” action dramatically and theatrically real. There are, however, clear differences in the structure and substance of these two choral songs. In *Seven*, the Chorus sings without any interruptions, other than their own interruptions of themselves, and the events they invoke should be understood to occur just off stage, at and beyond the city walls. In *Bacchae*, by contrast, the Chorus' more typical, cohesive song (519-575) ends when Dionysus calls out to them from within the palace, and the following passage involves both cries from Dionysus and responses from the Chorus. Further, the events that the Chorus describes should be happening on the stage, particularly the earthquake and collapse of the house. For these features, we can look to *Heracles* for precedents.

Certainly the most obvious connection between *Heracles* and *Bacchae* is the earthquake itself. More importantly, however, the structures of these two scenes are similar in their guidance of the audience through the progression of the unstageable action. In *Heracles*, as I have explained, Lyssa provides a detailed explanation of what she is going to do to Heracles, allowing both the Chorus and the audience to understand the ensuing sights and sounds as indicating the progressive playing out of Lyssa's predictions. After this scene representing the very moments of the destruction, the messenger then gives a detailed report of what happened inside the house, and Heracles himself ultimately appears, probably by way of the *ekkyklêma*, as he is currently bound to a fallen pillar, and his own words further confirm what has happened.

Similarly, in the scene preceding the choral song that evolves into the "palace-miracle" scene, Dionysus warns Pentheus of the destruction he is bringing on himself by taking him prisoner:

The god himself will release me, whenever I wish.

....

I, being of sound mind, warn you, not being of sound mind, not to bind me.

....

But Dionysus, whom you say does not exist,
goes after you for recompense for these insults/outrages.

For being unjust to us, you put him in bonds. (498, 504, 516-518)

Dionysus' warnings are more cryptic than Lyssa's detailed account of what she will do, but the exchange between Pentheus and Dionysus nevertheless provides some preparation for the god's punishment of Pentheus.

The "palace-miracle" scene itself, as we have already seen, invokes the unfolding of the earthquake, the destruction of the house, and Dionysus' escape from his bonds, using language that evokes immediacy, progression, and high emotion. While the language and syntax of this passage are most reminiscent of the Chorus' entry song in *Seven against Thebes*, the structure of this specific passage, as well as the larger arc that extends before and after it, is more reminiscent of the "unstageable" scene of *Heracles*. In *Seven*, the Chorus describes and creates the enemy's attack in a single, long, song. While its rhythm is choppy and its syntax often disjointed, it does not involve any interruptions from other characters, on or offstage. In *Heracles*, however, the Chorus' descriptions of the action and their worries for those inside the house are accompanied by periodic exclamations from Amphytrion, who is off stage and inside the house, in the thick of the unfolding action. Amphytrion's exclamations heighten the emotion and the immediacy of the scene, particularly because the Theban elders of this Chorus, while sympathetic to Heracles and his family, are not themselves in danger or in fear for their own safety. Similarly, the "palace-miracle" scene of *Bacchae* involves the Chorus' description of such events as the earthquake and the appearance of a flame on Semele's tomb, combined with Dionysus' calls to them from off stage, within the palace. Here, Dionysus is in control of the action inside, unlike Amphytrion, but his cries do serve to heighten the emotion and immediacy of the action in similar ways. His calls for an earthquake and for fire (585, 594-595) help to

create the sense of power and divine action that is vital to the scene and its intensity. This passage thus uses techniques of language and structure previously seen in both *Seven against Thebes* and *Heracles* to create a strong sense of immediacy, progression, and emotional intensity.

Next, as in *Heracles*, a character (here, Dionysus) comes on stage from the house and provides more specific details of what has happened inside. Dionysus clearly has a more active role in the destruction than does the Messenger in *Heracles*, but he nevertheless fills a parallel role to that of the Messenger when he comes outside, giving a detailed response (616-641) to the Chorus' requests that he tell them how he was freed (613, 615).¹²⁹ In fact, Dionysus' first speech upon entering confirms at least a degree of reality of the earthquake: "You have felt, as it seems, Bacchus / shaking to pieces the house of Pentheus?" (605-606). One could argue that this proves only that Dionysus knows that the Chorus has *felt* an earthquake and not necessarily that an earthquake actually occurred, but given its placement of immediately following the action itself, it is much more likely to function similarly to the Messenger's report in *Heracles*: for an audience that might be confused about how to interpret what it has just seen and heard, this comment serves as a guide to interpretation. Furthermore, Dionysus' more extended account of the events also confirms that a flame appeared on Semele's tomb: "Bacchus, having shaken the house, and having come, placed a flame/fire on the tomb of his mother" (623-624). Dionysus explains that Pentheus

¹²⁹ "But how were you set free, having met an impious man?" (613), and "But did he not bind fast your hands in binding knots?" (615).

misperceived this flame as a fire consuming his entire house (624-626), but he gives no indication that the flame on the tomb did not, in fact, appear.

Dionysus' past-tense account of the preceding events mentions both of the most supernatural, "unstageable" events that the Chorus had perceived, the earthquake and the fire, and thus it provides guidance to the audience for its own interpretation of what has happened. The basic structure here follows that of the scene from *Heracles*: each involves a preparation followed by a scene of immediate, progressive description of the action as it happens, followed by a clearer, past-tense account of the action. Dionysus' report may not be as objective as that of a typical messenger, but it still provides the framework necessary for an audience to interpret action that may have been staged very abstractly or not at all.

In the epiphany of Dionysus in *Bacchae*, Euripides thus uses elements of the precedents found in both *Seven against Thebes* and *Heracles*, blending techniques that his audience would likely have known. This scene does not have as many or as explicit directives to the audience as does *Heracles*, but then, why should we expect that? Perhaps the audience is more sophisticated at this point in "reading" such scenes, or at least Euripides may expect it to be. Further, is it not a natural course for a playwright to experiment with a technique or convention that already has some precedent? The experiment of *Bacchae*, then, would be to combine the wilder, more emotional elements of the scene in *Seven against Thebes* (and possibly other plays that we do not have) with the type of events represented in *Heracles* and the structure used there to lead the audience through the experience and interpretation of the events.

Exploding the Boundaries of the Stage in *Prometheus Bound*

In all three of the examples of unstageable action we have seen so far, it is the chorus who creates that action. The chorus of Greek tragedy is often understood as some kind of connection point between the audience and the performance, whether that connection is figured as the chorus providing a commentary on the action, speaking as the general citizenry, serving as an onstage audience, or otherwise ushering the spectators through an experience of the performance. Given this general understanding of the function of the tragic chorus, as varied as individual critics' and particular tragedies' versions of it might be, it seems natural that the chorus would be the vehicle through which the audience would understand and experience stage action that might otherwise be unclear. Nevertheless, extant tragedy offers one powerful example of "unstageable" action that does not follow this trend and thus stands in contrast to the techniques used in *Seven against Thebes*, *Heracles*, and *Bacchae*.

At the end of *Prometheus Bound*, Zeus (unseen) fulfills his threats to punish Prometheus for his defiance, and in the final 24 lines of the play, the Chorus falls silent, and possibly exits, leaving Prometheus himself to narrate the cataclysm, whatever its staging might have entailed, as it occurs. This moment is certainly not the only way in which *Prometheus Bound* breaks from conventions and puzzles those who would attempt to interpret it or imagine an original performance: the play has been the subject of a variety of fervently debated controversies, covering topics ranging from

authorship¹³⁰ to the staging of the Chorus of Oceanids in their (supposedly) flying vehicles.

Aside from the authorship question, most of the issues that trouble critics are related to the staging of the play. How was Prometheus bound to the rock? Did the Chorus really enter in flying vehicles? How could that even be possible with the Greeks' stage technology? Did Oceanus enter on some kind of flying creature? What happens to the Chorus at the end of the play? What happens to Prometheus? Indeed, the authorship and stagecraft controversies even intersect for some critics, as Oliver Taplin explains his understanding:

It is hard to suppress the suspicion that there was a cruder and less creditable motive for this staging [of the Chorus]: in such an uneventful and wordy play the dramatist felt that some extraordinary and outlandish 'happening' was needed to enliven the scene. Throughout this book I maintain that gratuitous spectacle is the resort of a poor playwright who is at a loss for true dramatic material, and that Aeschylus, as a great theatrical artist, integrates the visual aspects of the drama into the work as a whole. This is not the case, it seems, in *Prom[etheus]* as we have it. (Taplin (1977) 260)

¹³⁰ Alan Sommerstein provides a succinct summary of the major scholarship on this issue in his introduction to the play in the Loeb edition (p. 432-433). Attribution to Aeschylus was never doubted in antiquity, but recent scholars have raised questions and proposed a range of other possibilities, including Aeschylus' son Euphorion as the author or reviser.

This line of reasoning leads to the general rule that I discussed earlier concerning some critics' approach to spectacle in Aeschylus: anything that seems outlandish and gratuitous must be an interpolation by another writer.

Prometheus is certainly a problematic text, and arguing for or against Aeschylean authorship does not resolve at all the central questions about the play and its staging. Ultimately, of course, we can never know exactly how the Greeks staged the original performance, but as with *Bacchae*, we can look to some surrounding theatrical examples to develop further our understanding of how the spectacle of this play might function, both in a practical sense and in a dramatic one.

The precise date of *Prometheus* is uncertain, although there are external clues that would place it sometime between the 460s and 430 BC.¹³¹ In relation to the other plays I have discussed as examples of “unstageable” action, then, *Prometheus* was most likely produced after *Seven against Thebes* (467 BC) but well before *Heracles* (ca. 416 BC) or *Bacchae* (probably 405 BC). In this context, I propose that we can understand *Prometheus Bound* as another experiment, whose success is debatable and ultimately unknowable, in how to use and stage spectacular action that would seem too big or otherwise impossible for the stage. Aeschylus had already used the chorus to create an attack on a city in *Seven against Thebes*, and the tetralogy that included

¹³¹ Alan Sommerstein summarizes the evidence in his introduction to the play (p. 433-434). Cratinus parodied *Prometheus Unbound*, the sequel to *Prometheus Bound*, in 429, giving a relatively firm date by which the play must have been produced. There is less evidence for a boundary on the other end of the range: Sommerstein notes that the play includes a clear reference to *Suppliants*, which places it after that play, but the dating of *Suppliants* is itself very unclear. Aeschylus' son Euphorion won first prize in 431, so for those who argue for Euphorion as the playwright or reviser, this is a very attractive date (Sommerstein 434).

that play won first prize, suggesting a positive reception. *Prometheus Bound*, then, can be seen as a later experiment that takes several further steps in the extremity of the action invoked and also employs some important structural or technical variations in the creation of that action.

The flying entrances of the Chorus and of Oceanus are deservedly the subject of much critical discussion, but these moments could be handled in a variety of ways without substantially altering the course of the play.¹³² The final moments of the play, however, are undoubtedly climactic and fundamental to the overall action and progress of the play, as the fulfillment of Zeus' threats to punish Prometheus, first for giving fire to mortals and then for refusing to tell what he knows about how Zeus might father a son who would overthrow him. The representation of this final action, then, through both words and staging, must communicate clearly to the audience what is happening, even if the surviving clues to that representation are less clear to readers almost 2500 years later.

Structurally, the preparation for and invocation of the play's final cataclysm are similar to those found in *Heracles*. In Euripides' play, Lyssa's description of what she will do prepares the audience to understand the action that follows, and then the Chorus, supported by Amphitryon and his exclamations, creates the experience of the action as it happens. Similarly, in *Prometheus Bound*, Hermes' detailing of what Zeus

¹³² This is what would lead Taplin and others to conclude that the spectacle is gratuitous. I would counter that we do not have enough evidence for how these instances of flight were handled to understand how important they were to the experience, if not to the plot and central meaning, of the play. Certainly it is possible that the Chorus' and Oceanus' flying entrances highlighted the burdens and imprisonment of both Prometheus and Io, and I am unwilling to write off this and similar potential effects as superfluous.

will do to punish Prometheus if he does not obey, along with Prometheus' own specific defiance of those threats, sets up expectations for the specific events to follow.

As he nears the end of his attempt to convince Prometheus to yield to Zeus' commands, Hermes adds more specific details to his warnings of what Zeus will do to punish Prometheus. He begins his detailed description of the torments to come by ordering Prometheus to look at what will happen if he disobeys: "But look at/consider [σκέψαι], if you do not obey my words, / what a storm and triple-wave of evils / will come upon you, inescapable" (1014-1016). Significantly, the detailed prediction that follows begins with an imperative of a verb of perception, "σκέψαι" [look at/consider], which should prepare the spectators to picture the events for themselves as Hermes describes them. Just as the Chorus' words of perception in *Seven against Thebes* create a powerful, sensory impression of the enemy's attack, this word might be an early, subtle suggestion to the audience of the visual, spectacular nature of the action to come, whether they later see an elaborate staging or imagine it for themselves.

According to Hermes' predictions, the event will include thunder and lightning that will shatter the rock and bury Prometheus in the debris, to be followed later by daily visits from Zeus' eagle:

... First, indeed, with thunder
and with lightning fire the father will tear apart
this jagged chasm and will hide/cover your
body, and a rocky embrace will hold you.
And when a great length of time has been completed,

you will come on a return to the light. And the winged
hound of Zeus, the tawny eagle, fiercely
will cut apart your body to great tatters.
Coming forth uncalled to an all-day banquet,
it will feast itself on your liver, becoming black with gnawing. (1016-
1025)¹³³

Of these events, the eagle's visits would belong to some future time, after the end of the action of this play but likely in its sequel. Based only on this speech of Hermes, the actions that seem to belong to the cataclysm that unfolds at the end of the play include the thunder and lightning and the destruction of the rock, presumably culminating in the burial or disappearance of Prometheus.

Prometheus follows Hermes' warning with another expression of his defiance, and here he lists some possible actions that Zeus could take and boldly insists, "Even with all of that, he will not kill me" (1053). Prometheus' mocking speech reiterates some of the events that Hermes has already mentioned, but it also adds new possibilities to that list, as Prometheus dreams up even more horrific punishments and announces that even those would not kill him or persuade him to relent:

As for these things, let the two-edged curl of fire
be thrown against me, and let the aether/air
be roused with thunder and a spasm
of fierce winds, and may the wind shake

¹³³ For Hermes' complete speech, lines 1007-1035, see the appendix at the end of this chapter.

the earth from its foundations by its roots,
and let the wave of the sea with jagged roaring/surging
demolish the paths
of the heavenly stars. And let him throw
my body altogether into dark Tartarus
with firm whirls of force. (1043-1052)

Even though the added phenomena of winds, earthquakes, roaring waves, and a hurling into Tartarus are not specifically threatened in Hermes' speech, Prometheus here brings these into the audience's imagination. It is no small wonder that critics have tended to focus so strongly on Prometheus being swallowed up into Tartarus, despite the fact that Hermes does not predict this precise event. Oliver Taplin complains about this very common hasty assumption:

It seems universally agreed that Prometheus is swallowed down into Tartarus. But the text does not actually authorize that. When Hermes gives the official account of Prometheus' punishment in 1016-19 he says nothing about Tartarus. It is true that Tartarus is invoked in his taunt at 1026-9. But in its context this is not really a prediction; the audience would take it simply as an ἄδύνατον. It is Prometheus, not Hermes, who suggests that he will go to Tartarus... (1050-3). He is not saying what Zeus will do, but is defying him by saying '*let him do what he will, he cannot kill me.*' (Taplin (1977), 272)

While Taplin is certainly correct in his explanation of what each character specifically says, he does not consider the possibility that the perhaps over-enthusiastic adoption of

this thrilling further event by critics could reflect a likely audience experience and response. If a modern reader can feel swept up in this excitement and lose track of whether Hermes or Prometheus suggested the most spectacular or the punishments, how much more so might a spectator elide such specifics in the course of a performance? Again, we cannot know exactly how the end of the play was staged, and that staging might have made the specific events clear, but regardless, I would argue that Prometheus' final speech of defiance introduces a new idea to the spectators' imaginations, and theatrical logic would suggest that it would now be a part of their larger sense of what the cataclysm might entail.

Hermes' speech of warning and Prometheus' speech of defiance thus prepare the audience for whatever realization of the threatened punishment the play might provide. The remainder of the play does leave many questions open as to exactly what happens. Hermes advises the Chorus to leave so that they at least might escape, but the Chorus responds with an expression of support and loyalty to Prometheus, insisting that they will stay and suffer alongside him. Hermes reminds everyone that he has warned them and is not responsible for whatever will befall them, and then he exits.¹³⁴

It is here that our understanding of the action and staging becomes particularly uncertain, as Prometheus describes Zeus' fulfillment of his threats as it unfolds:

And now in deed/reality, and no longer in word,
the earth has been made to shake/roll!

¹³⁴ He does not specifically say that he is leaving, but his final speech suggests that, and from a practical standpoint, there is already a serious challenge in how to get the Chorus and Prometheus off the stage or how to end the play without doing so, so I think it is extremely unlikely that he would linger.

And from the depths an echo of thunder
bellows back, and fiery spirals
of lightning burst forth, and whirlwinds whirl around
dust, and with a spring, gusts
of all winds blow against each other,
making known their discord,
and the aether has been thrown into confusion by the sea. (1080-1088)

With the first line, Prometheus makes it very clear that the cataclysm is dramatically and theatrically real, taking place in real action [“ἔργῳ”] and not merely in words or stories [“μῦθῳ”] (1080). Regardless of the extent to which this action is being staged physically and visibly, it is very much real and immediate in the world of the play.

This line ushers in the cataclysm by emphasizing the reality, immediacy, and presence of the action, that is, its immediacy in terms of both time and place: the events are to be understood as taking place in this very moment and in the space represented on the stage (not, that is, in some offstage location).

Prometheus proceeds to describe the events using the present tense that we should now expect,¹³⁵ mixed with some verbs in the perfect tense that indicate that Zeus has done something whose results are now happening, as with “σεσάλευται” [it has been made to shake] in line 1081. Together, these verbs support the theatrical reality that the future tense of prediction and defiance has become a present tense of immediate, progressive realization. Prometheus’ specific list of phenomena here

¹³⁵ See, for example, “παραμυκᾶται” [bellows] (1082) and “εἰλίσσουσι” [whirl/blow around] (1085).

hearkens back to both Hermes' warning and to his own refusal to capitulate. His description of the cataclysm as he experiences it includes an earthquake, thunder, lightning, whirlwinds of dust, strong winds blowing against each other, and some kind of disturbance in the air caused by the sea. Hermes had explicitly mentioned the thunder and lightning, but the raging of the winds and the sea was Prometheus' own addition in defiance, and thus we have evidence, against Taplin's careful distinction between what Hermes predicts and what Prometheus invokes simply as possibilities, that the ideas of potential punishments have now been blended, not only in the minds of readers and spectators, but also in the play's own realization of the potentials previously invoked. Given this blending, it is also entirely possible that the play does end with Prometheus either disappearing into Tartarus or being buried in debris as his rocky crag shatters. While he never says that he is being swallowed up by either Tartarus or rocks, the audience has been prepared for a climax along these lines, and an abstract staging could stand in for a more elaborate theatrical reality, relying on the audience's imagination to fill in the gaps.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ In his commentary, Mark Griffith argues: "It is most likely that, here again, the words did the work, and P. remained in view of the audience as the storm was imagined raging round him" (277). He also, however, presents some of the other possibilities that have been proposed for the end of the play. For example, "P. may have been so positioned that part of his 'rock' was able to be withdrawn through a door in the *skene*, or perhaps the rock itself opened up (i.e. 'collapsed', cf. 1018-19) and allowed P. to sink back out of sight (so E. Simon, *Das antike Theater* (Heidelberg 1972) 32-33). Use of the *ekkyklema*, or of a trap-door, for this purpose is possible, but unlikely; (see Pickard-Cambridge, *TDA* 100-22, Taplin 442-3, 447-8)" (277). My inclination would be to imagine a middle ground, as I have done elsewhere, that involves some degree of visible, physical staging but relies on other forms of supporting theatrical communication to clarify the action and make it real to the audience.

Prometheus' final speech thus creates theatrically a great supernatural cataclysm involving a powerful storm and earthquake, possibly culminating in his disappearance into Tartarus or under rocks. Structurally, the play leads the audience through the understanding and experience of the event very similarly to methods found in *Heracles*. The speeches of Hermes and Prometheus introduce particular phenomena as being part of the threatened punishment, setting up expectations for the audience of what this event will ultimately involve, just as Lyssa's speech in *Heracles* gives the audience specific foreknowledge of what will happen in the house. In both plays, these predictions serve to clarify whatever physical staging will accompany the verbal creation of the action itself, helping the spectators to "read" whatever they see on the stage. Each play then features the immediate, progressive representation of the action with the high emotions and present-tense verbs characteristic of the *Seven against Thebes* parodos.

The most significant way in which *Prometheus Bound* departs from these other models, however, is in the creation of the action by a character/actor, rather than by the chorus. This, I would like to suggest, is what makes the end of the play so baffling for a reader: what has happened to the Chorus? The collective nature of the voice and experience featured in the creation of unstageable action in *Seven*, *Heracles*, and *Bacchae* is integral to the theatrical effect of each example, as it suggests the large scale of the action and its pervasiveness throughout the theatrical space. With Prometheus as the only speaking witness of the cataclysm, however, we are left to wonder whether the event is so localized as to affect only him, contrary to Hermes' warnings to the Chorus, or whether the Chorus has fled without any exit speech or

other indication, which would be unusual but possible. If the Chorus remains present, what would it mean for them not to experience the action or to experience it without sharing that experience in speech? If the Chorus is still on stage here, it is not functioning as an effective connection point between stage and audience: the communal sharing of the experience is not offered, or at least it is not offered as strongly and openly as it is in the other examples we have seen. If, on the other hand, the Chorus leaves the stage, that sudden exit could be theatrically effective, and it would solve the practical dilemma of how to get the Chorus off the stage at the end, but it would also emphasize Prometheus' isolation in a way that might lessen the impact of the unstageable action for the audience.

The role of the Chorus in the final moments of the play has long been a point of contention, and in his commentary, Mark Griffith summarizes the three major options that scholars have proposed: the Chorus can run away before or during Prometheus' final speech (as Thomson argues), stay on until the play ends and then leave with a "canceled" exit (supported by Taplin, Arnott, and Pickard-Cambridge), or disappear into Tartarus with Prometheus (as Wilamowitz and many early critics imagined) (Griffith 277). Each possibility involves some serious problems, and ultimately this is a conundrum that we can never solve. We simply cannot know whether the Chorus stayed or left, but in either case, the absence of that collective voice drastically affects the performance of those final events. Despite the stasis of the majority of the play, *Prometheus Bound* is arguably the most spectacular of the extant Greek tragedies, and its techniques and effects can best be understood in relation to other plays that attempt to stage similarly unstageable action.

From this angle, we can see the play using some of the techniques that *Seven against Thebes* had used (most likely before *Prometheus*) to create highly emotional, immediate, and spectacular action, as well as the basic structural pattern that *Heracles* would use years later to lead the audience through a preparation, experience, and recap of such action. While we cannot make the argument too strongly, given the tiny fraction of all Greek tragedy that remains to us, I would like to suggest that *Prometheus Bound* shows us why all of the other examples of extreme, large-scale, “unstageable” action feature the narration of the chorus. My hypothesis is that *Prometheus Bound* is, among other things, an experiment in the creation of the kinds of action I have termed “unstageable” and that, unlike its (likely) predecessor *Seven against Thebes*, it is not wholly successful. This is not to say that audiences did not like it, and indeed, if it was actually produced by Euphorion in his winning tetralogy of 431, they almost certainly liked it very much, but it is possible that the play proved that using a character/actor to create such action is less successful, or possibly just more difficult, than using a chorus. *Prometheus Bound* thus stands as another example of the techniques characteristic of the creation of unstageable action but also provides an important point of contrast through its conspicuously different use of its chorus.

Medea’s “Dragon Chariot”: Intersections of Action and Object

The battles, earthquakes, and physical destruction found in *Seven against Thebes*, *Heracles*, *Bacchae*, and *Prometheus Bound* represent the most large-scale, spectacular, “unstageable” action in extant Greek tragedy. There is also, however, another moment that has been the subject of similar critical debate with respect to its

stagecraft: at the end of Euripides' *Medea*, Medea claims to be escaping to Athens in a chariot provided by her grandfather Helios. How could a flying chariot carrying Medea and the bodies of her two sons possibly have been represented on the Greek stage? While the *mechanê* is a tempting proposal for allowing her to fly in her chariot, and many scholars have argued for this staging,¹³⁷ C.W. Marshall has shown that this is not a reasonable suggestion in terms of practicality and the laws of physics.¹³⁸ The problem is that Medea needs to be physically separated from Jason, and she needs some kind of representation of a chariot to contain her and the children's corpses, yet an elaborate chariot flying through the air with that much weight is simply impossible on that stage.

In light of this discussion of “unstageable” action, Medea's chariot emerges as an “unstageable” prop or set piece. The chariot is dramatically real, in that it is necessary for the plot and action of the play that she have a means of escape to Athens that keeps her safely out of Jason's reach, and it is theatrically real, in that the audience must understand it to be present on the stage in that moment. The chariot itself, however, may look very little like a “real” chariot. In contrast to the detailed verbal creations of unstageable action that we have seen, Medea speaks only very briefly to the presence of her chariot:

παῦσαι πόνου τοῦδ'. εἰ δ' ἐμοῦ χρειάν ἔχεις,

¹³⁷ For example, in his commentary on the play, Donald Mastronarde describes the scene thus: “above the centre of the *skênê* a prop-chariot carrying Medea and dummy-corpses of the children comes into view, carried by the rising arm of the crane. The chariot is not described in the text, but is clearly capable of flight, so is in some way winged...” (377).

¹³⁸ Marshall explored issues related to the *mêchanê* in a lecture at Cornell University in 2008.

λέγ' εἴ τι βούλῃ, χειρὶ δ' οὐ ψαύσεις ποτέ·

τοιόνδ' ὄχημα πατρὸς Ἥλιος πατήρ

δίδωσιν ἡμῖν, ἔρυμα πολεμίας χερρός. (1319-1322)

[If you have a need/favor of me, say it if you wish, but you will never touch me with your hand; such is the chariot [ὄχημα] that my father's father Helios has given to me, a bulwark against a hostile hand.]

While some have drawn on mythology and vase paintings to imagine an elaborate flying chariot drawn by serpents, the text itself tells us very little. For the purposes of the play, it is necessary only for the audience to know that Medea is in a chariot [“ὄχημα”] beyond Jason's reach and that it has come from a supernatural source.

The staging of unstageable action relies on a detailed, extended speech or choral song that leads the audience through an experience of the unfolding action and emotion. For an unstageable object, either a prop or a set piece, however, there is no temporal element, and so the invocation of that object can be shorter and simpler. In this case, Medea simply tells the audience how to “read” whatever representation of a chariot might be on stage and then moves on to her arguments with Jason. This example provides further support for a general understanding of how Greek tragedy can make the “unstageable” theatrically real, present, and vital, but it also highlights the distinctions between the treatment of action and the treatment of objects. Some props may simply be unseen, but in *Medea* some kind of physical representation of a chariot must be on stage to support and separate her, yet the requirements for the appearance of that object become minimal in light of her helpful gloss on it. The unstageable prop/set piece, therefore, needs some verbal (and possibly gestural)

creation just as the unstageable action does, but a much shorter, simpler description is sufficient to confirm its identity and reality.

Conclusion

Given the limitations of the surviving evidence, many questions about the staging of Greek tragedy must always remain unanswerable. We do not know exactly how sophisticated the Greeks' stage technology might have been, and our knowledge of actors' movement and other matters of performance is similarly limited.

Nevertheless, some tragedies include action that operates on a very large scale and seems impossible to stage in anything remotely approaching realism, and these examples illuminate some of the unique and powerful qualities of the Greek theater. Events such as battles and earthquakes can become theatrically real and vital through the careful use of language, particularly by a collective chorus, and that language coupled with gesture or abstract staging can even make those events *seem* visible and otherwise real to the senses. Performance inherently involves powerful communication between performers and spectators, and the techniques for staging such action reveal the active, vibrant nature of the relationship between stage and audience in Greek tragedy. This form thus emerges as a theater with a unique capacity for staging the unstageable and granting a sense of immediacy and presence to such action as it unfolds before the audience.

As the perceptual language of some examples suggests, the staging of unstageable action relies on a complex invocation and use of the senses, as characters and spectators perceive and experience that action. As questions of which stage

properties might be seen or unseen, along with the resulting implications, extend to issues of larger action, the complex role of perception in this performance form becomes even more integral to understanding how the communication intrinsic to performance occurs. A further area of inquiry, then, naturally becomes the nature of perception itself and particularly perception as the Greeks understood it. What does it mean to see or to hear? Are some senses more reliable than others? How does perception affect the perceiver? How might it affect the person or thing perceived? An exploration of perception can thus provide a new way of interrogating the many unresolved questions about both Greek stagecraft and Greek concerns about the nature and potential effects of theatrical spectatorship.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 3: FULL TEXTS OF KEY PASSAGES

1. Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes*, Scout's Speech (39-68)

a. Greek text from Alan H. Sommerstein's edition for the Loeb Classical Library (2008).

{ΚΑΤΑΣΚΟΠΙΟΣ}

- Ἐτεόκλεες, φέριστε Καδμείων ἄναξ,
40 ἤκω σαφῇ τάκειθεν ἐκ στρατοῦ φέρων·
αὐτὸς κατόπτης δ' εἴμ' ἐγὼ τῶν πραγμάτων.
ἄνδρες γὰρ ἔπτα, θούριοι λοχαγέται,
ταυροσφαγοῦντες εἰς μελάνδετον σάκος
καὶ θιγγάνοντες χερσὶ ταυρείου φόνου
45 Ἄρη τ' Ἐνυῶ, καὶ φιλαίματον Φόβον
ὠρκωμότησαν, ἣ πόλει κατασκαφὰς
θέντες λαπάξιν ἄστυ Καδμείων βίᾱ,
ἣ γῆν θανόντες τήνδε φυράσειν φόνω·
μνημεῖά θ' αὐτῶν τοῖς τεκοῦσιν εἰς δόμους
50 πρὸς ἄρμ' Ἀδράστου χερσὶν ἔστεφον, δάκρυ
λείβοντες, οἶκτος δ' οὔτις ἦν διὰ στόμα·
σιδηρόφρων γὰρ θυμὸς ἀνδρεῖα φλέγων
ἔπνει, λεόντων ὥς Ἄρη δεδορκότων.
καὶ τῶνδε πύστις οὐκ ὄκνω χρονίζεται,
55 κληρουμένους δ' ἔλειπον, ὥς πάλω λαχῶν
ἕκαστος αὐτῶν πρὸς πύλας ἄγοι λόχον.
πρὸς ταῦτ' ἀρίστους ἄνδρας ἐκκρίτους πόλεως
πυλῶν ἐπ' ἐξόδοισι τάγευσαι τάχος·
ἐγγὺς γὰρ ἤδη πάνοπλος Ἀργείων στρατὸς
60 χωρεῖ, κονίει, πεδία δ' ἀργηστής ἀφρὸς
χραίνει σταλαγμοῖς ἵππικῶν ἐκ πλευμόνων.

σὺ δ' ὥστε ναὸς κεδνὸς οἰακοστρόφος
 φάρξαι πόλισμα, πρὶν καταγίσει πνοᾶς
 Ἄρεως—βοᾷ γὰρ κῦμα χερσαῖον στρατοῦ—
 65 καὶ τῶνδε καιρὸν ὅστις ὥκιστος λαβέ·
 κ' αὖ γὰρ τὰ λοιπὰ πιστὸν ἡμεροσκόπον
 ὀφθαλμὸν ἔξω, καὶ σαφηνεῖα λόγου
 εἰδῶς τὰ τῶν θύραθεν ἀβλαβῆς ἔση.

b. English translation.¹³⁹

SCOUT

Eteocles, best ruler of the Cadmeans,
 40 I have come bringing clear news from the army there;
 and I myself am an eyewitness of these matters.
 For seven men, brave company leaders,
 cutting a bull's throat into an iron-rimmed shield
 and touching the bull's blood with their hands,
 45 to Ares and Enuo and blood-loving Phobos (Terror)
 they swore an oath, either to sack the town of the Cadmeans
 by force, placing destruction on the city,
 or, dying, to mix the land into a paste with blood;
 and they were encircling memorials of themselves on the chariot
 50 of Adrastus for their parents at home, letting flow
 their tears, and there was no pity through their mouths;
 for an iron-hearted spirit, blazing with manly courage,
 was breathing, as lions seeing Ares (war) clearly.
 And inquiry of these things is not prolonged with delay,

¹³⁹ Each English translation in this appendix is my own. In these translations, I have generally striven to render the meaning and structure of the Greek literally in order to represent the Greek accurately for readers without Greek. For staging, teaching, or casual reading, however, I would recommend a looser translation less stilted and more dynamic English.

55 but I left them drawing lots, so that each of them,
drawing from the lot, would lead against the assigned gate.
For this, let the best men chosen from the city
be stationed at the entrances of the gates at once;
for already the fully armed army of the Argives
60 draws near, raises dust, and stains the ground
with drippings of bright foam from the horses' lungs.
And you, just like a trusty helmsman of a ship
fortify the city, before the blasts of Ares
rush down on it—for the dry-land surge of the army shouts forth—
65 and take the quickest moment for these things;
and I for my part will keep up a loyal
daytime-scout eye, and perceiving the things outside
with the clear facts of my report, you will be unharmed.

2. Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes*, Chorus' Entrance Song (78-181).

a. Greek text from Alan H. Sommerstein's edition for the Loeb Classical Library (2008).

{ΧΟΡΟΣ}

< > θρέομαι φοβερά μεγάλ' ἄχη·
μεθεῖται στρατὸς στρατόπεδον λιπών·
80 ῥεῖ πολὺς ὅδε λεῶς πρόδρομος ἱππότας·
αἰθέρια κόνις με πείθει φανεῖσ'
ἄναυδος σαφὴς ἔτυμος ἄγγελος.
†έλεδέμας†
πεδί' ὀπλόκτυπ' ὥτ' ἡρίμπται βοάν·
85 ποτᾶται, βρέμει δ' ἀμαχέτου δίκαν
ὔδατος ὀροτύπου.
ἰὼ ἰὼ θεοὶ θεαί τ', ὀρόμενον
κακὸν ἀλεύσατε.

- βοᾶ < > ὑπὲρ τειχέων·
- 90 ὁ λεύκασπις ὄρνυται λαὸς εὐ-
 πρεπῆς ἐπὶ πόλιν διώκων <πόδα>.
 τίς ἄρα ρύσεται, τίς ἄρ' ἐπαρκέσει
 θεῶν ἢ θεᾶν;
- 95 πότερα δῆτ' ἐγὼ <πάτρια> ποτιπέσω
 βρέτη δαιμόνων;
 ἰώ, μάκαρες εὐεδροί.
 ἀκμάζει βρετέων ἔχεσθαι· τί μέλ-
 λομεν ἀγάστονοι;
- 100 ἀκούετ' ἢ οὐκ ἀκούετ' ἀσπίδων κτύπον;
 πέπλων καὶ στεφάνων <πότε> ποτ' εἰ μὴ νῦν
 ἀμφὶ λιτανὰ <βαλεῖν > ἔξομεν;
 κτύπον δέδορκα· πάταγος οὐχ ἑνὸς δορός.
 τί ῥέξεις; προδώσεις, παλαίχθων
- 105 Ἄρης, γὰρ τεάν;
 ὦ χρυσοπήληξ δαῖμον, ἔπιδ' ἔπιδε πόλιν
 ἄν ποτ' εὐφιλήταν ἔθου.

{στρ. α.} θεοὶ πολιάοχοι χθονὸς, †ἴθ' ἴτε, πάντες†,
 ἴδετε παρθένων

- 110 ἰκέσιον λόχον δουλοσύνας ὕπερ.
 κύμα περὶ πτόλιν δοχμολόφων ἀνδρῶν
- 115 καχλάζει πνοαῖς Ἄρεος ὀρόμενον.
 ἀλλ', ὦ Ζεῦ πάτερ παντὸς ἔχων τέλος,
 πάντως ἄρηξον δαΐων ἄλωσιν.
- 120 Ἀργεῖοι δὲ πόλισμα Κάδμου
 κυκλοῦνται, φόβος δ' ἀρείων ὅπλων
 <θράσσει>, διὰ δέ τοι γενύων ἱππίων
 μινύρονται φόνον χαλινοί·

125 ἐπτα δ' ἀγήνορες πρέποντες στρατοῦ
δορυσσοῖς σαγαῖς πύλαις ἐβδόμαις
προσίστανται πάλῳ λαχόντες.

{ἀντ. α.} σύ, τ', ὦ Διογενὲς φιλόμαχον κράτος,

130 ῥυσίπολις γενοῦ,
Παλλάς, ὃ θ' ἵππιος ποντομέδων ἄναξ
ἰχθυβόλῳ < > μηχανᾷ·

135 ἐπίλυσιν φόβων, ἐπίλυσιν δίδου.
σύ τ', Ἄρης, φεῦ φεῦ, πόλιν ἐπώνυμον
Κάδμου φύλαξον κήδεσαί τ' ἐναργῶς.
καὶ Κύπρις, ἅτε γένους προμάτωρ,
ἄλευσον· σέθεν γὰρ ἐξ αἵματος
γεγόναμεν, λιταῖσι δέ σε θεοκλύτοις

145 αὐτοῦσαι πελαζόμεσθα·
καὶ σύ, Λύκει' ἄναξ, λύκειος γενοῦ
στρατῶ δαΐῳ· σύ τ', ὦ Λατογένει-
α κούρα, τόξον εὐτυκάζου.

{στρ. β.} ἔ ἔ ἔ ἔ·

151 ὄτοβον ἀρμάτων ἀμφὶ πόλιν κλύω·
ὦ πότνι' Ἥρα·
ἔλακον ἀξόνων βριθομένων χνόαι·
Ἄρτεμι φίλα·

155 δορυτίνακτος αἰθὴρ ἐπιμαίνεται.
τί πόλις ἄμμι πάσχει; τί γενήσεται;
ποῖ δ' ἔτι τέλος ἐπάγει θεός;

{ἀντ. β.} ἔ ἔ ἔ ἔ·

ἄκροβόλος δ' ἐπάλξεων λιθαῖς ἔρχεται·

160 ὦ φίλ' Ἀπολλων·
 κónαβος ἐν πύλαις χαλκοδέτων σακέων·
 παῖ Διός, ὅθεν
 πολεμόκραντον ἀγνὸν τέλος ἐν μάχῃ,
 σύ τε, μάκαιρ' ἄνασσ' Ὀγκα πρὸ πόλεως,
 165 ἐπτάπυλον ἔδος ἐπιρρύου.

{στρ. γ.} ἰὼ παναλκεῖς θεοί,
 ἰὼ τέλειοι τέλειαί τε γᾶς
 τᾶσδε πυργοφύλακες,
 πόλιν δορίπονον μὴ προδῶθ'

170 ἑτεροφώνῳ στρατῷ·
 κλύετε παρθένων κλύετε πανδίκως
 χειροτόνους λίτας.

{ἀντ. γ.} ἰὼ φίλοι δαίμονες,
 175 λυτήριοί τ' ἀμφιβάντες πόλιν
 δείξαθ' ὥς φιλοπόλεις,
 μέλεσθε θ' ἱερῶν δαμίων,
 μελόμενοι δ' ἀρήξατε·
 180 φιλοθύτων δέ τοι πόλεις ὀργίων
 μνήστορες ἔστε μοι.

b. English translation.

CHORUS

I cry out for terrifying, great sufferings!
 The army, having left its camp, has been set loose;
 80 this huge horse throng gushes forth at a run;
 the dust visible in the air persuades me,
 a voiceless but clear and true messenger.

The soil <of my land>¹⁴⁰
 hoof-resounding, brings the noise/shout near to my ear.
 85 It flies and it roars, just like an unconquerable
 torrent dashing down a mountain.
 O, o, gods and goddesses, keep off
 the rushing evil!
 The noise <of a war-cry comes>¹⁴¹ over the walls;
 90 the white-shielded crowd rises up,
 shining, driving against the city.
 Who then will save us, who then of the gods or goddesses
 will bring aid?
 95 Then indeed should I fall down before
 the wooden images of the gods?
 It is the time to clasp the images—why
 do we delay, wailing loudly?
 100 Do you hear, or do you not hear, the crash of shields?
 <When>, when if not now shall we indulge in
 <casting> robes and garlands around them as prayers?¹⁴²
 I see the noise—it is the crash of not one spear!
 What will you do? Will you betray your own land, Ares,
 105 indigenous of old?
 O golden-helmeted god, look, look upon the city
 which once you beloved!

Gods, dwellers of the city and land, come, come all of you,
 see the band

¹⁴⁰ “The soil of my land” is Sommerstein’s translation and rendering of a corruption in the text (he supplies ἐλεδέμας as line 83).

¹⁴¹ Sommerstein notes and fills in a lacuna here, posited by Schroeder. The phrase “of a war-cry comes” is from Sommerstein’s translation.

¹⁴² Bracketed words here are part of my own translation but from emendations supplied by Sommerstein.

110 of maidens supplicating against being taken as slaves.
 A wave of men with nodding crests splashes/breaks
 115 around the city, urged on by the winds of Ares.
 But, o father Zeus, you who have the ultimate end of al,
 save us altogether from capture by enemies!
 120 The Argives are surrounding the city-buildings
 of Cadmus, and fear of their warlike weapons
 <throws us into confusion¹⁴³>, and the bridles through the jaws
 of the horses whine slaughter.
 125 And of the army seven men, heroic and clearly seen,
 with spear-brandishing and with full equipment come to stand
 at the seven gates, having been assigned by lot.

 And you, o offspring of Zeus, battle-loving power,
 130 become the savior of our city,
 Pallas, and the lord of the horse and ruler of the sea
 with his < > fish-spearing tool;
 135 give release from our fears, release!
 And you, Ares, ah, ah, guard the city
 named for Cadmus and be concerned for us visibly/manifestly.
 And Cypris, who are the first mother of our race,
 keep them away; for we have been born from your
 blood, and we approach you crying out
 145 with prayers calling on the gods.
 and you, lord Lycus (i.e. Apollo), become a wolf
 to the enemy army; and you, o Leto-born
 maiden, make ready your bow.

Ah, ah, ah, ah!

¹⁴³ Sommersteins' translation of θράσσει, which he accepts from Ritschl.

151 I hear the noise of the chariots around the city—
 O Mistress Hera!
 The joints of the heavy-laden axles rattle/shriek—
 Dear Artemis!

155 The air goes mad, shaken by battle!
 What does my city suffer? What will happen?
 And what end does the god yet bring it?

Ah, ah, ah, ah!
 A shower of stones thrown from afar comes to the battlements!

160 O dear Apollo!
 A clash of bronze-bound shields at the gates!
 Child of Zeus, from whom
 comes the pure/holy war-finishing end in battle,
 and you, blessed ruler Onca in front of the city,
 165 save your seven-gated seat.

O gods, shining over all alike,
 o perfect gods and perfect goddesses, be guards
 of the lands and towers;
 don't betray the city, toiling with the spear,
 170 to the foreign army!
 Hear, hear the all-righteous
 prayers, with outstretched arms, of the maidens!

O dear gods,
 175 delivering and standing around our city,
 show that you love the city,
 have care for the worship of the citizens,
 and, having care, help them.

180 And be mindful of our city's
sacrifices, offered zealously.

3. Euripides, *Bacchae*, Earthquake/"Palace-Miracle" Scene (576-603).

a. Greek text from David Kovacs's edition for the Loeb Classical Library (2002).

{ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ}

576 ἰώ,
κλύετ' ἐμᾶς κλύετ' αὐδᾶς,
ἰὼ βάκχαι, ἰὼ βάκχαι.

{ΧΟΡΟΣ}

τίς ὄδε, τίς πόθεν ὁ κέλαδος
ἀνά μ' ἐκάλεσεν Εὐίου;

{ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ}

580 ἰὼ ἰώ, πάλιν αὐδῶ,
ὁ Σεμέλας, ὁ Διὸς παῖς.

{Χο.}

ἰὼ ἰώ, δέσποτα δέσποτα,
μόλε νυν ἀμέτερον ἐς
θίασον, ὦ Βρόμιε Βρόμιε.

{ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ}

585 <σεῖε> πέδον χθονός, Ἕννοσι πότνια.

{ΧΟΡΟΣ}

—ᾶ ᾶ,
τάχα τὰ Πενθέως μέλαθρα διατι-
νάξεται πεσήμασιν.
ὁ Διόνυσος ἀνὰ μέλαθρα·

590 σέβετέ νιν. —σέβομεν ὦ.

—ἴδετε λάιν' <ῶ> ἔμβολα κίοσιν
τάδε διάδρομα· Βρόμιος ἀλαλάζεται
στέγας <τᾶσδ'> ἔσω.

{ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ}

ἄπτε κεραύνιον αἶθοπα λαμπάδα,
595 σύμφλεγε σύμφλεγε δώματα Πενθέος.

{ΧΟΡΟΣ}

ἄ ἄ,
596 πῦρ οὐ λεύσσεις, οὐδ' αὐγάζη,
Σεμέλας ἱερὸν <τόνδε> ἀμφὶ τάφον,
ἄν ποτε κεραυνόβολος ἔλιπε
φλόγα Διὸς βροντά;
600 δίκετε πεδόσε δίκετε τρομερὰ
σώματα, μαινάδες·
ὁ γὰρ ἄναξ ἄνω κάτω τιθεὶς ἔπεισι
μέλαθρα τάδε Διὸς γόνος.

b. English translation.

DIONYSUS

576 O,
hear, hear my voice,
o Bacchants, o Bacchants!

CHORUS

Who is that, who and from where is the voice
of Euio that calls me?

DIONYSUS

580 O, o, again I shout,
the son of Semele, and of Zeus!

CHORUS

O, o, master, master!
Come now into our
thiasos/Bacchic revel, o Bromius, Bromius!

DIONYSUS

585 <Shake> the plain of the earth, o mistress/divine Earthshaker!

CHORUS

Ah, ah!

Soon the house of Pentheus
will be shaken apart into collapse.

Dionysus is in the house;

590 worship him! O, we worship him!

Look at these stone wedges on the columns
falling apart! Bromios raises a shout
inside this roof/house.

DIONYSUS

Kindle the flashing, bright lightning;

595 burn to cinders, burn to cinders the house of Pentheus!

CHORUS

Ah, ah,

do you not see, nor perceive
the fire, around this sacred tomb of Semele,
whom once the lightning flame
of Zeus left lightning-struck?

600 Throw to the ground, throw
your bodies, maenads!

For the lord, the son of Zeus comes against
this house, putting the above below.

4. Aeschylus (?), *Prometheus Bound*, Hermes' warning (1007-1035).

a. Greek text from Alan H. Sommerstein's edition for the Loeb Classical Library
(2008).

{EPMHΣ}

λέγων ἔοικα πολλὰ καὶ μάτην ἐρεῖν·

- τέγγη γὰρ οὐδὲν οὐδὲ μαλθάσση λιταῖς
 ἑμαῖς· δακῶν δὲ στόμιον ὥς νεοζυγῆς
 1010 πῶλος βιαζῇ καὶ πρὸς ἡνίας μάχη.
 ἀτὰρ σφοδρύνῃ γ' ἀσθενεῖ σοφίσματι·
 αὐθαδία γὰρ τῷ φρονοῦντι μὴ καλῶς
 αὐτὴ κατ' αὐτὴν οὐδενὸς μεῖζον σθένει.
 σκέψαι δ', ἐὰν μὴ τοῖς ἑμοῖς πεισθῇς λόγοις,
 1015 οἷός σε χειμῶν καὶ κακῶν τρικυμία
 ἔπεισ' ἄφυκτος. πρῶτα μὲν γὰρ ὀκρίδα
 φάραγγα βροντῇ καὶ κεραυνία φλογὶ
 πατὴρ σπαράξει τήνδε καὶ κρύψει δέμας
 τὸ σόν, πετραία δ' ἀγκάλη σε βαστάσει.
 1020 μακρὸν δὲ μῆκος ἐκτελευτήσας χρόνου
 ἄψορρον ἥξεις εἰς φάος· Διὸς δέ τοι
 πτηνὸς κύων, δαφοινὸς αἰετός, λάβρως
 διαρταμήσει σώματος μέγα ῥάκος.
 ἄκλητος ἔρπων δαιταλεὺς πανήμερος,
 1025 κελαινόβρωτον δ' ἦπαρ ἐκθoinάσεται.
 τοιοῦδε μόχθου τέρμα μὴ τι προσδόκα,
 πρὶν ἂν θεῶν τις διάδοχος τῶν σῶν πόνων
 φανῇ, θελήσῃ τ' εἰς ἀναύγητον μολεῖν
 Ἄιδην κνεφαῖά τ' ἀμφὶ Ταρτάρου βάθῃ.
 1030 πρὸς ταῦτα βούλευ', ὥς ὅδ' οὐ πεπλασμένος
 ὁ κόμπος, ἀλλὰ καὶ λίαν εἰρημένος·
 ψευδηγορεῖν γὰρ οὐκ ἐπίσταται στόμα
 τὸ Δῖον, ἀλλὰ πᾶν ἔπος τελεῖ. σὺ δὲ
 πάπταινε καὶ φρόντιζε, μηδ' αὐθαδίαν
 1035 εὐβουλίας ἄμεινον ἡγήσῃ ποτέ.

b. English translation.

HERMES

Even saying much, it seems that I will speak in vain;
for you have not been moistened nor softened by my
entreaties, but having champed your mouth as a newly-yoked
1010 colt, you are forced and you fight against the bridle.
But you are made vehement by a weak argument/sophism:
for stubbornness, for one not thinking well,
itself does not have greater strength than anything at all.
But look at/consider, if you do not obey my words,
1015 what a storm and triple-wave of evils
will come upon you, inescapable. First, indeed, with thunder
and with lightning fire the father will tear apart
this jagged chasm and will hide/cover your
body, and a rocky embrace will hold you.
1020 And when a great length of time has been completed,
you will come on a return to the light. And the winged
hound of Zeus, the tawny eagle, fiercely
will cut apart your body to great tatters.
Coming forth uncalled to an all-day banquet,
1025 it will feast itself on your liver, becoming black with gnawing.
Of such hardship expect no end,
until one of the gods as a successor of your toils
appears, and is willing to go into sunless
Hades and the dark depths of Tartarus.
1030 Decide for these things, as this is not a fabricated
boast, but indeed it has surely been said.
For Zeus' mouth does not know how
to lie, but he completes every word. But you
look about and consider: don't think

1035 that stubbornness is ever better than good counsel.

5. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus' speech of defiance (1040-1053).

a. Greek text from Alan H. Sommerstein's edition for the Loeb Classical Library (2008).

{ΠΡΟΜΗΘΕΥΣ}

1040 εἰδότι τοί μοι τάσδ' ἀγγελίας
ὄδ' ἐθώυξεν· πάσχειν δὲ κακῶς
ἐχθρὸν ὑπ' ἐχθρῶν οὐδὲν ἀεικές.
πρὸς ταῦτ' ἐπί μοι ῥιπτείσθω μὲν
πυρὸς ἀμφήκης βόστρυχος, αἰθήρ δ'
1045 ἐρεθιζέσθω βροντῇ σφακέλω τ'
ἀγρίων ἀνέμων, χθόνα δ' ἐκ πυθμένων
αὐταῖς ῥίζαις πνεῦμα κραδαίνοι,
κῦμα δὲ πόντου τραχεῖ ῥοθίῳ
ξυγχώσειεν τῶν οὐρανίων
1050 ἄστρον διόδους· εἰς δὲ κελαινὸν
Τάρταρον ἄρδην ῥίψει δέμας
τοῦμὸν ἀνάγκης στερραῖς δίναις·
πάντως ἐμέ γ' οὐ θανατώσει.

b. English translation.

PROMETHEUS

1040 He shouted [literally, “barked”] these messages to me,
already having seen/known them, and it is not shameful
for an enemy to suffer badly from his enemies.
As for these things, let the two-edged curl of fire
be thrown against me, and let the aether/air
1045 be roused with thunder and a spasm
of fierce winds, and may the wind shake

the earth from its foundations by its roots,
and let the wave of the sea with jagged roaring/surging
demolish the paths

1050 of the heavenly stars. And let him throw
my body altogether into dark Tartarus
with firm whirls of force.
Even with all of that, he will not kill me!

6. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus' final speech (1080-1093).

a. Greek text from Alan H. Sommerstein's edition for the Loeb Classical Library (2008).

{ΠΡΟΜΗΘΕΥΣ}

1080 καὶ μὴν ἔργῳ κούκέτι μύθῳ
χθῶν σεσάλευται,
βρυχία δ' ἤχῳ παραμυκᾶται
βροντῆς, ἔλικες δ' ἐκλάμπουσι
στεροπῆς ζάφυροι, στρόμβοι δὲ κόνιν
1085 εἰλίσσουσι, σκιρτᾷ δ' ἀνέμων
πνεύματα πάντων εἰς ἄλληλα
στάσιν ἀντίπνουν ἀποδεικνύμενα,
ξυντετάρακται δ' αἰθὴρ πόντῳ.
τοιὰδ' ἐπ' ἐμοὶ ῥιπὴ Διόθεν
1090 τεύχουσα φόβον στείχει φανερώς.
ὦ μητρὸς ἐμῆς σέβας, ὦ πάντων
αἰθὴρ κοινὸν φάος εἰλίσσων,
ἐσορᾷθ' ὥς ἔκδικα πάσχω.

b. English translation.

PROMETHEUS

1080 And now in deed, and no longer in word,

the earth has been made to shake/roll!
And from the depths an echo of thunder
bellows back, and fiery spirals
of lightning burst forth, and whirlwinds roll/whirl around
1085 dust, and with a spring, gusts
of all winds blow against each other,
making known their discord,
and the aether has been thrown into confusion by the sea.
Such a storm clearly marches
1090 against me from Zeus, producing terror.
O my holy mother, o aether,
rolling the common light on all,
see how unjustly I suffer!

CHAPTER 4

THE TOUCH OF THE SPECTATOR: PERCEPTION AS A POINT OF CONTACT

As investigation into stage properties and “unstageable action” has shown, the Greek stage was accustomed to create theatrically real, vital objects and action without necessarily using tangible, visible representations of those. Language, gesture, imaginations, and, possibly, very abstract representations may collaborate to create detailed, dynamic theatrical phenomena. In these cases, the spectators “see” these objects or actions through their imaginations, rather than simply through their physiological sense of vision: the unseen becomes the seen. The natural question then arises, can the seen somehow become unseen? If so, why might that be necessary? What might these complex spectatorial processes of imaginative seeing, physiological seeing, and imaginative “unseeing” mean in relation to Greek ideas about perception and then to the performance of Greek tragedy?

One could argue that the theater has long involved some degree of “unseeing,” with the audience needing or choosing to ignore a variety of conditions that might distract from the performance and the imagined world. Certainly naturalism relies on such selective unseeing, but even spectators of non-naturalistic theater may attempt to “unsee” or “unhear” such things as exit signs, cell phone noises, or the whispered conversations of people around them.¹⁴⁴ In Greek tragedy, however, imagining

¹⁴⁴ In the ancient Greek context, spectators of tragedy might “unsee” stage machinery, at least to some extent. Comedies, such as *Peace* and *Acharnians* call attention to the obtrusiveness of machinery (for these examples, the *mêchanê* and *ekkyklema*, respectively), and yet the same spectators might see those same machines used for

something literally seen to be unseen may be much more integral than these examples to the experience and meaning of the performance.

Epiphany: Gods on the Stage

The appearance of gods on the stage is a deeply complex issue for tragedy. Given the prevalence of gods as characters in Greek drama, it would be easy to take for granted their embodied, visual representation by actors, and yet their presence and visibility are not at all simple. In Book V of the *Iliad*, Athena comes to Diomedes when he calls out for his help, and she transforms his vision so that he might be able to see the gods as they fight in the battle: “ἀχλὺν δ’ αὖ τοι ἄπ’ ὀφθαλμῶν ἔλον, ἣ πρὶν ἐπῆεν, / ὅφρ’ εὔ γιγνώσκῃς ἡμὲν θεὸν ἠδὲ καὶ ἄνδρα” [...and I have taken the mist from your eyes, which was on them before, so that you might know well both god and man] (V.127-128). Athena’s boon to one of her favorites confirms that in the Homeric world, despite the intermingling of gods and men on the battlefield, mortals are generally unable to see the divinities among them. Even when the gods are physically present and engaging directly in the action, the mortal heroes have some kind of “mist” [ἀχλὺν] over their eyes preventing them from seeing those gods. The concept that gods might be present but unseen thus has early and significant roots in the literary tradition, and it would likely have been very familiar to fifth-century Greeks.

Even if a mortal can see a god, that sight is not always right or safe. When Aphrodite first appears to Anchises in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, for example,

serious effects in tragedies within the same festival. Comedies might emphasize the noise or clumsiness of the machines, but tragedies might ask spectators to ignore those qualities.

she alters her appearance so that he will not be frightened by the sight of her full glory: “στῇ δ’ αὐτοῦ προπάροιθε Διὸς θυγάτηρ Ἀφροδίτη, / παρθένωι ἀδμήτηι μέγεθος καὶ εἶδος ὁμοίη, / μή μιν ταρβήσειεν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσι νοήσας” [And the daughter of Zeus Aphrodite stood in front of him, like an unmarried maiden in stature and appearance, lest he be afraid upon seeing her with his eyes] (81-83). She later reveals her divinity to him, and he confirms her earlier expectation, hiding his face with his cloak to avoid looking at her: “τάρβησέν τε καὶ ὅσσε παρακλιδὸν ἔτραπεν ἄλλῃ, / ἅψ δ’ ἄντις χλαίνῃ ἐκαλύψατο καλὰ πρόσωπα” [...he was afraid and turned his eyes aside, and he hid his handsome face in his cloak] (182-183). Indeed, Anchises has good reason to be afraid of seeing Aphrodite: the sight of a god in his full glory is dangerous and might even be fatal, as it is for Semele¹⁴⁵ when Zeus reluctantly appears to her as he does among the immortals.¹⁴⁶

In some tragedies, the appearance of a god is relatively straightforward, with the text clearly establishing that the characters can both see and hear the god. Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* certainly functions with the understanding that Apollo, Athena, and the Erinyes are present and able to interact with each other and with Orestes. To

¹⁴⁵ Apollodorus includes the story of Semele’s death in his *Library*, III.4.3. Dionysus gestures toward this history at the beginning of *Bacchae*, as he announces his arrival in Thebes: “And I see this tomb of my thunderstruck mother near the palace and the ruins of the house, smoldering with the still-living flame of Zeus’ fire, an immortal violence of Hera against my mother” (6-9).

¹⁴⁶ For more on epiphany in contexts other than tragedy, see Verity Platt’s forthcoming book, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature, and Religion*. Platt’s focus falls on examples and attitudes later than the classical period, but her study still includes some sections relevant to earlier contexts. The section “*What god is this?* Hymnic Guides to Epiphanic Viewing” in Chapter 1, “Framing Epiphany in Art and Text,” is particularly useful for considering the Homeric Hymns.

take a less obvious example, Euripides' *Andromache* features an appearance of the goddess Thetis at the end of the play, and before she speaks, the Chorus announces her approach:

ἰὼ ἰὼ·

τί κεκίνηται, τίνος αἰσθάνομαι

θείου; κοῦραι, λεύσσετ' ἄθρήσατε·

δαίμων ὅδε τις λευκὴν αἰθέρα

πορθμευόμενος τῶν ἵπποβότων

Φθίας πεδίων ἐπιβαίνει. (1226-1230)

[Oh, oh! What is this moving, which of the gods do I perceive?

Women, look, gaze! Here some god is passing through the clear aether

and comes down on the plain of horse-pasturing Phthia.]

The Chorus's exclamation at the sight of the descending goddess clearly signifies that they can, indeed, see Thetis.¹⁴⁷ Their language is specifically visual, with the words

“λεύσσετ'” and “ἄθρήσατε” exhorting each other to “see” the goddess,¹⁴⁸ a specificity

¹⁴⁷ This is, to some extent, a similar situation to the examples of unstageable action discussed in Chapter 3. The Chorus' present-tense, perceptual language helps to create the approach of the god, but the key difference here is that there is actually an actor coming onto the stage, and the audience can see that. (I do not think it would be feasible to keep the actor off stage or otherwise hidden, since the audience certainly needs to be able to hear his voice.) The Chorus' speech should help the spectators understand that whatever they see on the stage is representing the approach specifically of a god [“θείου,” 1227]. The Chorus can see the god, and the audience can see the actor, but the Chorus aids in the interpretation of that actor as god.

¹⁴⁸ A similar example occurs in Euripides' *Electra*. As Electra covers her mother's body, the Chorus exclaims: “But look [οἶδε], above the tops of the houses come some daemons/spirits or gods of the heavens. For that is not a path for mortals. Why ever do they come in an appearance to mortal sight?” (1233-1237). In Euripides' *Heracles*, the approach of Iris and Lyssa terrifies the Chorus of Old Men, who cry out, “Oh, oh!

that lies in contrast to several other examples of gods' appearances, in which characters emphasize their hearing of the god's voice or use words such as "αἰσθάνομαι," a more ambiguous word meaning "to perceive."¹⁴⁹ In *Andromache*, then, we can understand the goddess Thetis as visible to the characters on stage, due to the Chorus' excitement over seeing her approach.

The epiphany of Athena at the end of Euripides' *Ion* provides a more complex example, including a suggestion of why the appearance, and perception, of a god might be problematic. At the moment of Athena's appearance, Creusa has just revealed to Ion that his father is actually Apollo, and he is preparing to enter the temple to ask whether this is true. Suddenly, Ion exclaims:

ἔα· τίς οἴκων θυοδόκων ὑπερτελῆς
ἀντήλιον πρόσωπον ἐκφαίνει θεῶν;
φεύγωμεν, ὦ τεκοῦσα, μὴ τὰ δαιμόνων
ὀρώμεν, εἰ μὴ καιρός ἐσθ' ἡμᾶς ὀρᾶν. (1549-52)
[Oh! Who of the gods [θεῶν], rising above the incense-receiving temple, shows forth a shining/sun-facing face? Let us flee, o mother, and not see that [i.e. the face] of the divinities [δαιμόνων], if it is not the right time for us to see!]

Have we old men come into the same shower of fear, such an apparition do I see [ὀρώ] above the house? Flee, flee! Lift up your sluggish limbs, drive far away from here! Lord Paean, become a protector for me from calamities!" (815-821).

¹⁴⁹ This word could include seeing, hearing, feeling, or "sensing" the presence of the god and does not necessarily entail any one of those. See below for the analysis of Artemis' appearance in *Hippolytus* as an example of the use of αἰσθάνομαι.

Ion's surprise at seeing a god approach is quickly followed by anxiety, even fear, of looking upon the "shining"¹⁵⁰ [ἀντήλιον] face of a god when it is not right to do so. The gods can certainly be dangerous, and concern over what is or is not appropriate behavior for mortals is common. Athena quickly assures Ion and Creusa that she is actually benevolent towards them (1554-1555), but Ion's initial reaction confirms both that he does see this god and that such a sight may not be right for them.

While *Ion*'s example shows that the sight of a god may be dangerous or wrong for a mortal, other plays suggest that the mortal characters may not be able to see the god at all. Often, the god speaks before any other character mentions the approach of a god, suggesting that the voice may be the first indicator of that god's presence.¹⁵¹ Further, when gods appear at the ends of plays to resolve conflicts and give instructions, those words of instruction and prophecy are of primary importance.

When Athena appears at the end of Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, she interrupts Thoas as he prepares to pursue the escaping Iphigenia, Orestes, and Pylades, and she commands him to listen to her words: "ποῖ ποῖ διωγμὸν τόνδε πορθμεύεις, ἄναξ / Θόας; ἄκουσον τῆσδ' Ἀθηναίας λόγους" [Where, where do you advance your pursuit, King Thoas? Listen to the words of Athena.] (1435-1436). Athena's command not only emphasizes the importance of what she will say, but also serves to identify herself to Thoas, and by extension, to the audience. The scene never

¹⁵⁰ Literally, "ἀντήλιον" means "opposite the sun." "Shining" or "sun-reflecting" would be less literal definitions but capture the visual effect.

¹⁵¹ Examples include Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (1435), *Helen* (1642), *Orestes* (1626), and *Suppliant Women* (1183). Certainly the lack of mention of a god before he speaks does not prove that the god should be understood as invisible, but it does open up that possibility and focus attention on the god's voice.

specifically shows that the characters cannot see Athena, but the possibility is left open. Thoas' response to her instructions again focuses on her words: "Lady Athena, whoever, upon hearing [κλυῶν] the words [λόγοις] of the god is [then] disobedient, does not think straight" (1475-1476). Further, Athena's speech includes instructions for Iphigenia, who is now at sea and far from the area represented on stage, and yet the goddess delivers these with the second-person pronoun, as if she were speaking directly to Iphigenia: "σὲ δ' ἀμφὶ σεμνάς, Ἰφιγένεια, λείμακας / Βραυρωνίας δεῖ τῇδε κληδουχεῖν θεᾶ·" [And it is necessary for you [σὲ], Iphigenia, to be a priestess for this goddess in the holy meadows of Brauron] (1462-1463). The ability of Athena's voice to travel across this distance emphasizes the significance and supernatural quality of that voice, beyond whatever physical, visible presence she may have in front of the temple with Thoas.

Euripides' *Orestes* features a very similar example, with ambiguity and concern about perception of a god. Apollo appears at the end of the play, just as Orestes and Electra are about to set fire to the palace, while Menelaus calls for an attack. Apollo interrupts, telling Menelaus to calm down, and then identifies himself: "Φοῖβός σ' ὁ Λητοῦς παῖς ὅδ' ἐγγὺς ὢν καλῶ" [I, Apollo son of Leto, call you from nearby] (1626). As in *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, the emphasis is on the god's calling voice, and here, "ἐγγὺς" [nearby] even suggests that Apollo may be a short distance away or possibly invisible to the mortals, since he includes this note on his location. In his response to Apollo, Orestes praises the god for his truthful prophesying, but he also reveals that he was initially afraid, upon hearing this voice:

καίτοι μ' ἐσήει δεῖμα, μή τινος κλύων

ἀλαστόρων δόξαιμι σὴν κλύειν ὅπα. (1668-1669)

[Indeed, fear came upon me, lest I be hearing one of the avenging spirits but thinking that I heard your voice.]

Orestes, who has been suffering from visions of the Furies, has good reason to doubt his own perceptual clarity and to fear that a voice he hears would be from one of them, rather than from his advocate, Apollo. This fear is even more natural and significant if we understand the god to be invisible to the mortals: Apollo is a young, beautiful god, while the Furies are ugly, terrifying spirits, so the visual appearance of the two would not be at all ambiguous, and the moment of uncertainty during Apollo's first line, before he introduces himself, would be most dramatically logical and powerful if it truly is an uncertain one for the characters.

While some plays merely suggest the possibility that characters cannot see an onstage god, the prologue of *Ajax* clearly states this fact, and the scene involves a particularly complex constellation of perceptual abilities among the characters. As Odysseus cautiously traces Ajax's footsteps and tries to determine where he is, Athena appears and offers to be a "guardian"¹⁵² [φύλαξ] for him in his "hunt" [κυναγίᾳ] for information and the man himself (36, 37). She proceeds to recount Ajax's murderous rampage among the livestock, including her own role in confusing his vision (51-52), then announces that she will actually show Odysseus this madness: "δείξω δὲ καὶ σοὶ

¹⁵² As a simple definition, "φύλαξ" means "guard," but the word often refers to sentinels, that is, guards who look out for dangers, so this word also involves a sense of the visual. In fact, the Liddell and Scott lexicon includes "observer" as one of the secondary definitions. Athena, then, is suggesting that she will both protect and watch Odysseus in his efforts. In his Loeb edition, Hugh Lloyd-Jones renders Athena's offer as: "...some time ago [I] set out on the way, eager to guide you in your hunt," which adds a sense of her directing his efforts.

τήνδε περιφανῇ νόστον” [And I will show you this affliction/madness clearly from every side.] (66). Odysseus begs her not to call Ajax out from his hut, but Athena rebukes him for cowardice and brings the man out, making a concession to Odysseus’ concerns by promising to blind Ajax’s eyes to Odysseus: “ἐγὼ σκοτώσω βλέφαρα καὶ δεδορκότα” [I will darken/blind his eyes, even though they see.] (85).

Thus, in one complication of the characters’ perceptions, Athena blinds Ajax’s eyes to Odysseus, though it remains unclear whether she also deafens him to any sound of her companion, since she simply orders Odysseus to keep quiet, and he obeys: “σίγα νυν ἐστὼς καὶ μέν’ ὥς κυρεῖς ἔχων” [Now stand silently and remain as you happen to be.] (87). Further, while Athena seems to be able to see and hear both of the mortals, they cannot see her but only hear her voice, as Odysseus’ first response to her clearly indicates:

ὦ φθέγμ’ Ἀθάνας, φιλότατης ἐμοὶ θεῶν,
ὥς εὐμαθὲς σου, κἄν ἄποπτος ᾦς, ὅμως
φώνημ’ ἀκούω καὶ ξυναρπάζω φρενὶ... (14-16)

[O voice of Athena, dearest of gods to me, how clearly, although you are unseen, do I hear your voice/call and catch hold of it in my mind...]

Here, Odysseus uses her voice “[φθέγμ’]” in a synecdoche for the goddess herself and further specifies that she is “ἄποπτος,” literally, “away from sight/visibility” (15). Not only is the divine voice of primary importance, as in *Iphigenia among the Taurians* or *Orestes*, but it is also Odysseus’ only way to perceive his guide. Athena’s explanations

that her eye is “always” [ἀεὶ] upon him and that she came “a while ago” [πάλαι¹⁵³] suggest that she has been present through much of his search, without his knowledge, and Odysseus does not seem particularly surprised by this (1, 36).¹⁵⁴

In the opening scene, then, Athena can see and hear Odysseus and Ajax; Odysseus can see and hear Ajax but only hear Athena; and Ajax can hear Athena but not perceive Odysseus’ presence at all. These complicated perceptual relationships are further supported by the scene’s language, which constantly involves either direct discussion of the characters’ perception or metaphorical references to vision. Thus we hear not only Athena’s explicit explanation of how she is deceiving Ajax by casting deceitful understandings upon his eyes [“ῥύμασι”], for example, but also Odysseus’ report that an “ὀπτήρ” [scout] saw Ajax slaughter the herds and then his later conclusion that all men are “εἶδωλ[α]” [images or phantoms] (51-52, 29, 126).

If these mortal characters on the stage cannot see the goddess, what, then, does the audience perceive when watching the actor playing this role? In answer to this problem, Pietro Pucci suggests that the audience does not actually see the goddess in her full reality or divinity. Yes, there is an actor onstage and in a costume that in some way represents the goddess, but Pucci, relying partly on his investigation of gods’

¹⁵³ “πάλαι” places an event in the past, but how far in the past remains ambiguous. The most common meaning is “long ago,” but secondary usage would refer to the recent past, as in “just now” or “just before.” In this case, the more common usage seems appropriate, but I translate it as “a while ago” to capture the ambiguity of the word.

¹⁵⁴ Ajax never specifically mentions whether he can or cannot see Athena, though he does converse with her, assuming that she is his ally and protectress. However, Tecmessa’s description of Ajax’s madness the previous night does not mention any partner and specifies that he left alone [μόνος], so it seems that these mortal characters consistently perceive Athena only through hearing her voice (294).

epiphanies in epic, argues that this figure is merely a sign of Athena's actual invisibility to mortals:

The members of the audience, however, [unlike Odysseus] *do* see the goddess. But what they really see is her invisibility to Odysseus. ...the visibility of the gods is thinkable only by starting from their invisibility. Since the gods are invisible, their visibility is represented as a blank, as the unsayable, the unutterable. Accordingly here the audience see Athena – whatever the stage production presented of her – as a sign of her invisibility to Odysseus. Her figure is the sign of a blank. (Pucci (1994) 22)

Since the members of the audience do share in the mortality of Odysseus and Ajax, it seems likely that they should not imagine themselves to be so superior as to be able to see a complete revelation of Athena's divinity. Whether "the sign of a blank" or an abstract icon of some sort, the Athena that the audience does see should be understood as a stand-in for what cannot be seen by mortals, even those outside the world of the play. While seeing this actor, the audience imaginatively creates the unseen goddess, in a related but converse operation to the imaginative creation of an object or event from an unseen "blank."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ In *Religion in the Ancient Greek City*, Louise Bruit Zaidman and Pauline Schmitt Pantel provide some general background for the issue of something concrete standing in for a divinity, which cannot be contained or fully expressed by such. They explain, "The special characteristic of all religious representation is to endow the divinity being figured with a presence without obscuring the fact that it is not actually there. The cultic image must at the same time be thoroughly material – it can be touched, moved, manipulated – and yet leave no doubt that it stands for something which is not actually present" (215). This perspective also explains how the Greeks could use such a wide

Ajax places its audience in a very privileged position, with much more information, related much more directly, than is typical in tragedy. Athena herself appears onstage and says clearly exactly what she has done and why.¹⁵⁶ There are no oracles, no prophets, no messengers, no human interpretations of any sort.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, and perhaps even more strikingly, Ajax's suicide occurs on stage, with the audience as the only witness.¹⁵⁸ Again, there is no messenger to describe what happened behind closed doors and no need for the audience to rely on other characters' information and speculation about how and why the death occurred. Through all of the deception that drives the play, the audience is actually seeing more clearly than usual. Nevertheless, the need somehow to "unsee" Athena ultimately joins the spectators to the human characters, particularly Ajax and Odysseus, whose incomplete perceptions drive the action of the play and comment upon the lot of mortals.

variety of representations for the gods, from anthropomorphic statues and paintings to abstract forms such as the herm or simply a stone (215-218). Aniconic representation of the divine is thus a major tradition in Greek religion, and using a masked, costumed actor to stand in for an invisible, uncontainable divine is in keeping with this.

¹⁵⁶ A modern production could choose to keep Athena offstage, but I think it most likely that the actor would have been on stage in the original production. Certainly the acoustics would be much better with the actor in front of the *skênê*, rather than behind it, and Athena is on stage for a full scene, conversing regularly with two other characters, so the easiest solution would be to put the actor on stage and give the audience cues to understand and imagine the goddess as unseen.

¹⁵⁷ Tecmessa does relate the story of the previous night, but she does so only after Athena has described what really happened. Tecmessa thus provides the audience with information about her own, mortal perspective on the events, rather than the factual information of what took place.

¹⁵⁸ There is a scholarly debate about this. Some critics oppose the idea of an onstage suicide, suggesting that Ajax exits at the end of his speech, before falling on the sword. This is certainly possible, but I think his speech prepares the audience for an onstage death, and such a staging makes much better use of the heightened dramatic tension of the moment.

As a final example of the significance and complexity of staging the gods, we should turn to Euripides' *Hippolytus*, another case in which the precise mode of the mortal characters' perception a goddess remains ambiguous, though the situation here is complicated by a concern for what might be inappropriate for a god, not just a mortal, to see. Appearances of gods frame *Hippolytus*, with Aphrodite introducing the situation and explaining her intentions in the prologue and Artemis explaining Theseus' grave mistake and Aphrodite's role in the tragedy at the end of the play. Aphrodite's speech is unremarkable as a divine prologue, in its form and context: she is alone on stage, and as she introduces Hippolytus' entrance, she states that she will now leave (51-53). Presumably, she is gone before the mortal characters fully enter, so there is no opportunity for Hippolytus and his attendants to see or hear this goddess.¹⁵⁹

As they enter, Hippolytus and his servants, the Chorus, sing to the goddess Artemis as if she were present, including a direct-address greeting her (61-72) and a second-person pronoun ("σοι," 73) in their presentation of a garland to her. This language and their gestures, including presenting the garland and probably also adorning her statue with it,¹⁶⁰ support the sense of Hippolytus' companionship with the goddess and of Artemis' presence with her favorite, but there is no actor

¹⁵⁹ A bit later in the scene, Hippolytus and his Servant refer to a statue of Aphrodite as if it were the goddess herself, but clearly a statue simply stands in for the divinity without containing or fully embodying her (101). Although there may be some vague sense of the god's presence or attention, the mortals do not seem to expect the god to interact with them in direct, clear ways at this point.

¹⁶⁰ Hippolytus indicates the garland with the particle "τόνδε," which typically "points" to the referent, suggesting that the object is present on the stage (73). When Hippolytus uses the imperative "δέξαι" [receive] to exhort the goddess to take the crown, he probably places it on the statue (83). In his commentary on the play, Michael Halleran agrees that in lines 82-83 Hippolytus "probably presents the garland to the goddess's statue" (Halleran (1995) 155, note on 82-3).

representing Artemis on the stage at this point, and the scene lacks the direct interaction that marks an epiphany. Further, this opening scene introduces the idea that Hippolytus, despite his close relationship with her, cannot see the goddess:

μόνῳ γάρ ἐστι τοῦτ' ἐμοὶ γέρας βροτῶν·
σοὶ καὶ ξύνειμι καὶ λόγοις ἀμείβομαι,
κλύων μὲν αὐδῆς, ὄμμα δ' οὐχ ὁρῶν τὸ σόν.
τέλος δὲ κάμψαιμ' ὥσπερ ἠρξάμην βίου. (84-87)

[For this privilege is for me alone of all mortals: I am together with you, and I exchange words with you, hearing your voice, but not seeing your face.¹⁶¹ And may I reach the finish line of life just as I began it.]

Hippolytus declares his honored position as the goddess's companion, and he clearly states that he converses with her and hears her voice but admits that he does not see her. This brief song of worship and celebration thus sets up not only Hippolytus' companionship with and preference for Artemis, but also the unique perceptual quality of the relationship between this goddess and mortal, which then clarifies the nature of their interaction when Artemis appears at the end of the play.

Unlike the early scenes of Aphrodite's prologue and the mortals' worship of Artemis, Artemis' appearance at the end of the play involves direct interaction with Theseus and Hippolytus, as she reveals the true extent of the calamity to Theseus and

¹⁶¹ Here, “ὄμμα” [eyes] functions as a synecdoche to mean the “face,” “appearance,” or “sight” of a person. This is a common use of the word, but here, it also serves to emphasize the contrast between hearing and seeing, yielding a single line balanced with two hearing words (“κλύων” and “αὐδῆς”) in the first half of the μέν...δέ construction (often rendered as “on the one hand...on the other hand”) and two seeing words (“ὄμμα” and “ὁρῶν”) in the second half.

comforts her dying favorite. Artemis enters shortly after the Messenger's description of Hippolytus' violent accident, just as the Chorus acknowledges the power of Cypris (Aphrodite). She begins by commanding Theseus to listen and by introducing herself:

σὲ τὸν εὐπατρίδην Αἰγέως κέλομαι

παῖδ' ἑπακοῦσαι·

Λητοῦς δὲ κόρη σ' Ἄρτεμις αὐδῶ. (1283-1285)

[I order you, nobly born son of Aegeus, to listen! I, the maiden daughter of Leto, Artemis, speak to you.]

As Michael Halleran notes in his commentary on these lines, the command to listen and the god's introduction of herself are both typical elements for the beginning of a god's speech, and we have already seen similar beginnings in *Iphigenia among the Taurians* and *Orestes* (Halleran (1995) 258, n. on 1283-1285).¹⁶² As in these other examples, the emphasis in Artemis' speech falls on her words, as she commands Theseus to listen [“ἑπακοῦσαι”] to her and to hear [“ἄκουε”] about the current state of his misfortunes (1284, 1296).

Hippolytus' response to the goddess's presence further clarifies that the mortals can only hear, and not see, Artemis. Hippolytus enters, supported or carried by attendants, and laments his miserable fate at length, never acknowledging the presence of the goddess who has so often been his companion (1347-1388). Only after Artemis speaks to him does Hippolytus recognize her:

ἔα·

¹⁶² See also Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (1411-1412), which also involves a reference to seeing the god Heracles, and Euripides' *Suppliant Women* (1183-1184), *Electra* (1238-1240), *Ion* (1554-1555), and *Helen* (1642-1645).

ὦ θεῖον ὀσμῆς πνεῦμα· καὶ γὰρ ἐν κακοῖς

ὦν ἠσθόμην σου κἀνεκουφίσθην δέμας·

ἔστ' ἐν τόποισι τοισίδ' Ἄρτεμις θεά. (1391-1393)

[Oh! O divine breath of fragrance! Although I am in misfortune, I have perceived you and felt my body lighten. The goddess Artemis is in this place!]

Michael Halleran takes a literal approach to Hippolytus' exclamation here, explaining that he "knows the goddess only by her scent" (Halleran (1995) 264, n. on 1391-1393). In his translation, he accordingly renders "θεῖον ὀσμῆς πνεῦμα" as "divine fragrance," based on the definition of "πνεῦμα" as a "wind" or "breeze" (Halleran 139). However, "πνεῦμα" commonly means "breath" or "breathing," and if understood in this way, the phrase becomes a poetic expression of the goddess's voice as a fragrant perfume, a metaphorical extension appropriate for praising a god.¹⁶³ Since Hippolytus recognizes his companion only after she speaks, the latter interpretation is more likely in this context, and, further, an emphasis on her voice here fits with his earlier expression of his honor in conversing with Artemis and hearing her voice (85-86).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ See Liddell and Scott, "πνεῦμα." The first definition is "blast" or "wind," but the second definition is "breathed air" or "breath" and is also very common, with many examples and sub-definitions. Interestingly, "θεῖον πνεῦμα" later came to mean "Holy Spirit" in the Christian tradition.

¹⁶⁴ In *Tragedy's End: Closure and Innovation in Euripidean Drama*, Francis M. Dunn interprets Hippolytus' speech here as the delayed recognition and praise of the goddess that should normally accompany an epiphany: "In *Hippolytus*, this verbal expression of awe is postponed; the clumsy Theseus has no words of recognition for Artemis, who must wait for proper acknowledgement until the dying Hippolytus is brought onstage: 'Ah! Breath of divine fragrance! Even in my misfortune I sense you

Regardless of whether Hippolytus hears her voice or smells her fragrance, however, it is clear that he recognizes her through a mode of perception other than vision. He claims to have perceived her, using the word “ἡσθόμην,” which could imply seeing, hearing, or otherwise sensing her, and given his earlier statement that he cannot see her face, in conjunction with his failure to notice her presence before she speaks, the visual aspect of this ambiguous word is at least eliminated as a possibility. The audience, then, can see the actor playing Artemis but must imagine the goddess herself as unseen. The actor in costume indicates the presence of the god but, as with Athena in *Ajax*, actually serves as a sort of placeholder for an unseen divinity that transcends physical, contained representation, particularly by a mere mortal.

In her own pronouncements to Theseus, Artemis further extends the thematic significance of perception through the use of perceptual language that heightens the contrast between gods and mortals and, indirectly, the contrast between hearing and seeing. The latter contrast emerges in her first statement of Theseus’ ruin:

Θησεῦ, τί τάλας τοῖσδε συνήδη,
παῖδ’ οὐχ ὁσίως σὸν ἀποκτείνας
ψευδέσι μύθοις ἀλόχου πεισθεὶς
ἀφανῆ; φανεράν δ’ ἔσχεθες ἄτην. (1286-1289)

and my body is lightened, for the goddess Artemis is here’ (1391-93)” (31). Dunn does not, however, take into account the fact that even Hippolytus does not acknowledge her until after he has lamented his own fate in a speech of more than forty lines and even then does so only after she speaks to him. Dunn never considers the possibility that the mortals cannot see Artemis, but I think this is a more effective solution to the problem of the delays than simply “clumsiness” on Theseus’ part.

[Theseus, why do you, wretched one, rejoice at these things, having killed your son not piously, persuaded of unseen/unclear things by the false words of your wife? But you received a seen/clear destruction.]

Theseus did not derive his knowledge of the situation from evidence that he could see, but his wretchedness is already clear and visible to the gods, and by supplying true information, Artemis will make it visible to him. As she explains to Theseus exactly where he erred, Artemis tells him that when he used one of his three curses granted by his father, Poseidon, in order to ensure his son's death, "you were evil/base, in his sight and mine" [οὐ δ' ἐν τ' ἐκείνῳ κὰν ἐμοὶ φαίνεται κακός] (1320). While Theseus has been forced to rely on deceptive words, including Phaedra's suicide note and Hippolytus' refusal to break his oath by revealing the truth, Artemis and Poseidon, powerless to cross the will of another god,¹⁶⁵ have watched with full understanding as the tragedy unfolded. These contrasts emphasize the sharp divide between the knowledge and perceptual information available to the gods and those available to mortals. Phaedra, Hippolytus, and Theseus have all been hampered by the limitations of their sight and understanding, while the gods have looked on with full understanding, though limited ability to intervene.

In *Hippolytus*, then, the fact that the mortals cannot see the goddess Artemis when she appears at the end supports the play's thematic preoccupation with knowledge, deception, and human limitations. The gods may be watching everything from above, but the mortals themselves are left with either total blindness or partial, and thus dangerously deceptive, vision. Thus far, *Hippolytus* is not a particularly

¹⁶⁵ Artemis specifies that Zeus does not allow a god to cross another (1329-1334).

unusual case. Like *Ajax*, it features mortals who can hear but not see a goddess, as well as larger thematic significance related to that limitation. Mortals make mistakes based at least in part on their obscured vision and ready trust in what they hear, thus calling into question the reliability of seeing and hearing as sources of knowledge, as well as the disconnect in the knowledge available to mortals versus to gods. Alongside these relatively typical features, however, an additional concern for the limitations of perception emerges: what is or is not appropriate to see?

If tradition suggests that mortals cannot generally see gods in their full glory, at least not without repercussions, perhaps the inappropriateness of seeing a god, except under special conditions, is one explanation for why tragedy might have asked its spectators to perform this task of imaginative “unseeing.” The actor in costume provides a more iconic representation than a herm or an abstract stone, but when a play specifically clarifies that the mortal characters on stage cannot see the god, it also, by extension, reassures the spectators that they themselves are not seeing a real god. While it is unlikely that a spectator would actually confuse an actor with a real divinity, it is certainly possible that spectators might be nervous about the embodied representation of a powerful, sometimes threatening and volatile, god. Eventually, of course, the presence of god characters in onstage action becomes a convention in Greek theater, but perhaps it was not so innocuous or easily accepted early in drama’s development. By asking its spectators to “unsee” the represented gods, tragedy protects the important division between mortal and immortal, keeping actors and spectators alike aware of their own mortality and proper place in relation to the divine.

Defiling Sight: The Limits of Appropriate Seeing

The appearance of Artemis in Euripides' *Hippolytus* adds a new dimension to the issue of the appropriateness and reliability of perception, with Artemis' statement of the limitations of her own vision: she must leave her companion in his final moments because she cannot look upon the dead or dying.

καὶ χαῖρ'· ἐμοὶ γὰρ οὐ θέμις φθιτοὺς ὀρᾶν

οὐδ' ὄμμα χραίνειν θανάσιμοισιν ἐκπνοαῖς·

ὀρῶ δέ σ' ἤδη τοῦδε πλησίον κακοῦ. (1437-1439)

[And farewell; for it is not right for me to see the dead, nor to defile my eye/sight with dying breaths, and I see that you now are close to this misfortune.]

Artemis bids farewell because, as she explains, it is not “θέμις” [right, lawful, or sanctioned by custom] for her to look upon the dead or dying, since such a sight would defile her divine eyes.¹⁶⁶ This concern sheds some light on why certain sights might be inappropriate for certain viewers: not only is a corpse inherently unclean, but it is particularly out of place if in the presence of an immortal. Death may demand some purification rituals for those who bury or otherwise come into contact with the dead, but it is nevertheless an unavoidable component of life for mortals. For immortals, however, death has no place in their lives.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Apollo makes a similar comment in Euripides' *Alcestis*: “ἐγὼ δέ, μὴ μίασμά μ' ἐν δόμοις κίχῃ, / λείπω μελάθρων τῶνδε φιλότατην στέγην” [And I, lest pollution meet me in the house, leave the dearest roof of this house.] (22-23).

¹⁶⁷ In his commentary on *Hippolytus*, Barrett notes as an example that the life of Philemon includes the anecdote that the night before the comic poet died, he “had a dream in which nine young women left his house, saying that it was not θεμιτόν for

Mary Douglas's 1966 exploration of the nature of pollution in "primitive" religions, *Purity and Danger*, develops an approach to the unclean that fits well with Artemis' need to remove herself from Hippolytus' deathbed. According to Douglas, most unclean things are not inherently unclean; rather, things are unclean when they are out of their proper place, when they threaten the correct order of things: "Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained" (40). In the context of Greek religion, Louise Bruit Zaidman and Pauline Schmitt Pantel consider the example of blood as something that remains clean only when in appropriate places:

On the one hand, it is the very principle of life, coursing round the human body, and a means of consecration, as when it flows out upon the altar during an animal-sacrifice. On the other hand, it becomes filth and pollution when it is spilt onto the ground or gushes out over the body of a murder-victim. For when it is mixed with dust, blood signifies murder and death Pollution consists in the establishment of a link between entities which should be kept separated and distinct.
(10)¹⁶⁸

If purity is based at least in part on a separation of things that do not belong together, surely a separation of the immortal divinities from human death is in keeping with this logic.

them to remain; they were the Muses" (Barrett 414, note on lines 1437-1439). As this example and others show, the concept that the gods should avoid death is not unique to Euripides.

¹⁶⁸ See Bruit Zaidman and Schmitt Pantel, p. 10-11, for more examples of objects and beings that may involve either purity or pollution, depending on the context.

Perhaps this need for separation similarly helps to explain why mortals often cannot see gods: the holiness of the gods may be too powerful for full perception of them by mortals to be appropriate, as was the case when Zeus revealed his full divinity to Semele. Ion's concern for the dangers of seeing the goddess Athena in Euripides' *Ion* would thus be somewhat parallel to Artemis' need to avoid seeing Hippolytus' dying moments. Just as Artemis asserts that it is not "θέμις" for her to see the dead or dying, Ion wants to flee to avoid seeing the face of the god, if it is not "καιρός" [the right/appropriate time] for that (1552). Inappropriate seeing can lead to pollution, and concerns about seeing, being seen, polluting others, and polluting oneself are pervasive in tragedy.

The concern with perception and pollution, in the sense of the appropriate separation of things that do not belong together, continues through the end of *Hippolytus*. As Hippolytus draws nearer to death, he tells his father that darkness is coming upon his eyes and that he can see the gates of the underworld (1444, 1447). His changing perceptions indicate his slipping from one world to another,¹⁶⁹ and finally, he asks his father to cover his face: "κεκαρτέρηται τᾶμ' ὀλωλα γάρ, πάτερ. / κρύψον δέ μου πρόσωπον ὥς τάχος πέπλοις" [My time for persevering has ended; for I have been lost/I am dying, father. But cover my face immediately with my

¹⁶⁹ For a very similar example of changing vision as a sign of dying, see Alcestis' death scene in Euripides' *Alcestis*, especially line 385: "καὶ μὴν σκοτεινὸν ὄμμα μου βαρύνεται" [And truly my eye/vision grows oppressed with darkness]. "Looking upon the light" is a common metaphor for life in Greek literature, and these (rare) onstage death scenes take up that metaphor in reverse.

garments.] (1457-1458). As Theseus expresses his final lament, he most likely complies with his son's final wish, drawing his clothes over his face.¹⁷⁰

Covering the dead is a sign of respect and piety in many cultures, but particularly in the context of the play's earlier preoccupation with appropriate separation, including both Hippolytus' limited perception of Artemis and Artemis' need to leave before seeing Hippolytus' dying breath, this final gesture functions as the ultimate separation of father and son, living and dead. Hippolytus is losing his vision, a mark of life, and as he drifts into darkness, Theseus shrouds his visibility as well. Hippolytus' request may also reflect concern for those around him: contact with a corpse involves a degree of pollution, and the dying man is, in essence, protecting his father and others from such defilement, while also facilitating one final moment of poignant contact and reconciliation between himself and Theseus before he dies. This concern would be in keeping with Hippolytus' release of his father from the guilt and pollution of spilling kindred blood,¹⁷¹ completing the process of release and purification in this intensely human moment.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ There is no way to confirm with full certainty that the actor did this on the stage, but it is a simple, yet highly significant action, and not staging it would be misleading and entirely inappropriate for the final moment of the play, after the reconciliation of father and son.

¹⁷¹ {Θη.} ἡ τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναγνον ἐκλιπὼν χέρα;

{Ιπ.} οὐ δῆτ', ἐπεὶ σε τοῦδ' ἐλευθερῶ φόνου (1448-1449)

[Theseus: "[Will you go] leaving my hand unclean? Hippolytus: No indeed, since I free you of this murder]

¹⁷² In his study of shame and purity in the play, Charles Segal explains that the very thing that defiles the goddess purifies the mortals here: "As he was once a *miasma* to his father (946), but now renders him pure, he is, conversely, at this his deepest moment of human purity, unclean in the eyes of his virgin goddess. Death which would defile the remote Olympian can bring a kind of purity between men" (298). This contrast again heightens the distinction between gods and mortals.

Concern about what one sees is a recurring theme in tragedy, whether the object of one's vision is a god, a corpse, or a polluted person. Just as Hippolytus asks his father to cover his face in his dying moments, other characters cover their faces either to prevent others from becoming polluted by seeing them, or to avoid seeing something that could bring pollution on themselves. To begin with the example from the end of *Hippolytus*, tragedy offers many scenes with dead bodies, and several of those feature the bereaved covering the corpse, hiding it from further sight. Sophocles' *Antigone*, of course, turns on the debate surrounding and the consequences of Antigone covering her brother's body with a little dirt, as a symbolic or provisional attempt at burial, but other plays involve a corpse covered with clothing immediately after death, well before full burial rites.

In Euripides' *Electra*, Orestes exhorts his sister to help him cover their mother's body with her robes, after the two have killed her and Aegisthus, then come to feel remorse and despair at their current lot:

λαβοῦ, κάλυπτε μέλεα ματέρος πέπλοις

ἄνδρ' ἀνδρὶ καὶ γυναικὶ καθάρμοσον σφαγῆς.

φονέας ἔτικτες ἄρα σοι. (1227-1229)

[Take hold, and cover the limbs of our mother with garments, and join together/close her wounds. You bore, then, your own murderers.]

Electra replies, as the two, presumably, cover the body:

ἰδοῦ, φίλα τε κοῦ φίλα

φάρεα τάδ' ἀμφιβάλλομεν,

τέρμα κακῶν μεγάλων δόμοισιν. (1230-1232)

[Look! On her both dear and not dear we cast these cloths/shrouds, the culmination of great evils for our house.]

Orestes and Electra cover Clytemnestra's body in a ritual-like gesture that might prefigure a full funeral and burial. Electra's exclamation "ἰδοῦ" [Look!] highlights the spectatorial aspect of the process, as they both look at the mother they have murdered and cover her from sight. Orestes' call to close her wounds emphasizes the respectful element of their action, confirming that they cover her not simply to protect themselves from further pollution, but also as fulfillment of their filial duties

This covering of the body and step towards respectful mourning makes a sharp turn from Orestes' initial response upon killing his mother, one of shameless spectacle. As the inner scene is revealed, perhaps by means of the *ekkyklema*, Orestes fearlessly proclaims:

ἰὼ Γᾶ <τε> καὶ Ζεῦ πανδερκέτα
βροτῶν, ἴδετε τάδ' ἔργα φόνι-
α μυσάρᾳ, δίγωνα σώματ' ἐν
χθονὶ κεχυμένα πλαγᾶ <διπλᾶ>
χερὸς ὑπ' ἐμᾶς, ἄποιν' ἐμῶν
πημάτων... (1177-1182)

[O Earth and Zeus, all-seeing of mortal things, look upon these bloody, foul/polluted deeds, double bodies outstretched on the ground by a double blow by me, compensation for my sufferings...]

Several lines are lost after this point, and by the time our text resumes, Electra calls the sight "δακρυτ[ός]" [tearful], and the mourning and despair begin. The visibility of

the corpse on the stage thus illustrates the siblings' attitude towards their mother and their deeds: unabashed spectacle accompanies feelings of defiance and triumph, while covering comes with their growing sense of internal conflict and despair, if not in recognition of the evil of their actions, at least at the thought of the few options that remain to them as matricides.

The question of whether one should look upon a corpse is a complex one: on the one hand, contact with a corpse defiles the world of the living with the world of the dead, but on the other hand, appropriate burial rites and appeasement of the dead require that the closest kin do come into contact with the corpse. In *Honor Thy Gods: Popular Religion in Greek Tragedy*, Jon D. Mikalson discusses this first concern, that of the polluting nature of corpses. As he explains, one “purpose of burial rites was to remove from the world of the living the pollution of death. The clearest evidence of this pollution is the decaying flesh of the visible and tangible body, and burial or cremation eliminated that. One wishes to avoid or remove this ἄγος (S. *Ant.* 255-256), leaving the dead ἄγνός and oneself εὐαγής¹⁷³” (123-124).¹⁷⁴ Proper care and burial of the body thus serves as the primary means of purification, despite involving more

¹⁷³ Mikalson leaves these terms untranslated, but definitions would be: pollution [ἄγος], pure/holy [ἄγνός], and free from pollution [εὐαγής].

¹⁷⁴ Other examples confirm that corpses were considered polluting or otherwise frightening in Greek culture. Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood cites Plutarch's *Lycurgus* 27, for example, as evidence for the Spartan exception to the almost universal move to extramural burial in the archaic and classical Greek world. As she recounts, Lycurgus instituted a law that “permitted intramural burial as a means of familiarizing youths with death, so that they do not shrink from it, fearing that they would become polluted if they touched a corpse or trod on a grave” (438). Sourvinou-Inwood sees the transition to extramural burial (i.e. outside the city walls) as part of a trend of increasing death avoidance.

direct pollution for the immediate kin, for whom that pollution is actually in some sense right and sacred.¹⁷⁵

In “*Reading*” *Greek Death*, Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood particularly emphasizes this importance of separation in her examination of the grave monument in Homer:

The heaping of the burial mound or erection of any other form of grave monument is the last act in the manipulation of the deceased’s remains during the last stage of the burial ceremony, which marked the end of the period of abnormality that followed a death and the restoration of normality and order. The closure of the grave, completed and sealed with the erection of the mound, marks the final stage in the separation of the deceased from the world of the living and the community: now his shade is incorporated into Hades and his body/bones into the earth, both beyond boundaries: the shade beyond the infernal river, the corpse beyond the mound of earth or other less emphatic physical boundary of the burial space. Thus its erection was inextricably connected with this separation. (109)

In Book XXIII of the *Iliad*, as Sourvinou-Inwood shows, Achilles announces the burial of Patroklos with three specific ritual acts: the cremation of the corpse, the erection of the grave monument, and the cutting of the mourners’ hair, and these acts

¹⁷⁵ This, of course, is the situation at the end of *Hippolytus*: Theseus must come into contact with the dying Hippolytus in order to cover him, but the end result is a covered, separated corpse and the completion of his own purification from kindred murder.

collectively ensure the final separation of himself from his friend (110). Further, she continues, Achilles' refusal to wash until after completing the burial is a "narrative transformation...of the ritual behaviour pertaining to the death-ritual before the burial ceremony which involves deliberately taking on pollution as part of the process of embracing death; this embracing of pollution and death entails also a partial identification with the deceased and it is acted out in the pre-burial part of the death-ritual" (111). The larger process of funeral rites may be a means of removing pollution from the world of the living, but even so, it must involve some temporary pollution, which Achilles so dramatically embraces, while the bereaved mourn and prepare the body for burial.

As Sourvinou-Inwood's study of Iliad XXIII shows, the entire burial process serves as a ritual of separation of the dead from the living, and if the erection of the grave monument indicates the final passage of the soul into Hades, that element of the ritual, the burial itself, must be of vital importance for the dead as well as for the living. Sarah Iles Johnston, too, explores this idea in her study of "ghost stories" and relations between the living and the dead in ancient Greece. As she explains, the dead cannot enter the Underworld until they have had a proper burial, and the living must take care to fulfill their obligations (9-11). For the sake of both themselves and the dead, then, the living must work through the sequence of funeral rituals in order to ensure both the deceased's passage to Hades and their own safety from lingering pollution.

Sophocles' *Ajax* clearly exemplifies this tension between the needs to look upon and to cover the dead. When Ajax's concubine Tecmessa and the Chorus of his

sailors first discover his body, their first impulse is to hide him from sight. The Chorus asks where Ajax lies (912-914), and Tecmessa responds:

οὔτοι θεατός· ἀλλά νιν περιπτυχεῖ
φάρει καλύψω τῶδε παμπήδην, ἐπεὶ
οὔδεις ἂν ὅστις καὶ φίλος τλαίῃ βλέπειν
φυσῶντ' ἄνω πρὸς ῥίνας ἔκ τε φοινίας
πληγῆς μελανθὲν αἷμ' ἀπ' οἰκείας σφαγῆς. (915-919)

[No, he is not to be seen! But I will cover him entirely with this enfolding cloth, since no one, no one who is a friend, would endure to look upon him spouting dark blood upwards to his nostrils and out from the bloody strike/wound, from self-slaughter.]

Tecmessa's action of covering the body provides a dramatically powerful moment of contact between her and the man who had served as her protector in this foreign camp. Further, her strong statement that no friend ["φίλος"] would want to endure the pain ["τλαίῃ"] of looking on this bloody and lamentable sight both emphasizes the suffering that such a sight provokes in a grieving seer and suggests the scornful laughter or similarly disrespectful response that the sight could provoke in an exulting enemy. Though she couches it in a statement about how the bereaved would feel, Tecmessa is clearly concerned about the reactions that Odysseus, Agamemnon, and Menelaus might have. Her covering of the body, therefore, serves several functions: it begins the process of preparing the body for burial by respectfully placing that first barrier between the dead and the living; it relieves the bereaved from the pain of

looking at the body any further; and it protects the body from the disrespectful gazes of enemies.

Despite Tecmessa's immediate decision to cover the body, Teucer's own immediate response to the scene that greets him when he finally returns to camp is to uncover the body and look at the painful sight:¹⁷⁶

ὦ τῶν ἀπάντων δὴ θαμάτων ἐμοὶ
ἀλγιστον ὦν προσεῖδον ὀφθαλμοῖς ἐγώ,
....
ἀγῶ κλυῶν δύστηνος ἐκποδῶν μὲν ὦν
ὑπεστέναζον, νῦν δ' ὀρῶν ἀπόλλυμαι.
οἴμοι.

ἴθ', ἐκκάλυψον, ὥς ἴδω τὸ πᾶν κακόν. (992-993, 1000-1003)

[O of all sights most painful to me, of those I have looked upon with my eyes! I, wretched one, hearing it [i.e. the news of Ajax's death] while a long way off, groaned, but now, seeing it, I am utterly destroyed. Alas! Go, uncover him, so that I might see the whole evil.]

Seeing the body brings closeness and stronger pain than simply hearing the report of the suicide, but while Teucer does not enjoy the sight, as Tecmessa predicts no friend would do, he insists upon seeing the body anyway, in order to “see the whole evil.”

¹⁷⁶ Plato provides a good example of similar ambivalence toward looking at a corpse in Book IV of the *Republic*, 439e-440a. As part of his discussion of how a man's mind might be divided by two divergent desires or thoughts, he tells the story of a man walking outside the city walls who becomes aware of [“αἰσθόμενος”] dead bodies. He both wants and does not want to look at them, and at first he covers his head to avoid the sight, then finally loses his self-control and looks at them.

His command may also be a way of acting upon his duties as close kin and new protector of Ajax's dependents, in keeping with the usual tension between the need to administer proper honors and burial rites and the need then to remove the corpse and purify oneself.¹⁷⁷

Teucer continues to lament both Ajax's fate and his own bleak prospects until Menelaus' approach turns his attention to the need to bury his brother, against the wishes of the Argive commanders. In a play very much concerned with issues of seeing and being seen, which begin with Athena's invisibility in the prologue, this sequence of covering, uncovering, arguing over burial, and finally beginning the burial rites emphasizes the significance of a corpse's visibility and of a prompt burial. Respectful interaction with the dead demands first contact, then separation, while disrespectful attitudes feature spectacle.¹⁷⁸

Despite the clear significance of covering corpses, as a first step towards the all-important burial rites, many instances of covering bodies or faces in tragedy

¹⁷⁷ The ambivalence of these conflicting desires to see and to not see the dead seems similar to the ambivalence surrounding materials that may be either sacred or polluted, depending on context. These distinctions and their implications are not by any means absolute.

¹⁷⁸ A final example of covering a corpse, most similar to the example of Euripides' *Electra*, would be the Argives' immediate move, in an offstage scene, to cover Polyxena's body with leaves after she has been sacrificed in Euripides' *Hecuba* (573-574). The messenger reports this covering as the Argives' response to Polyxena's courage and virtue in offering herself to the sacrifice and refusing to allow anyone to hold her. Incidentally, the tragedy's report of this scene is very different from the rendering on the Polyxena Sarcophagus, which shows three men holding Polyxena horizontally, at waist height, while another man (probably Neoptolemus) pulls her head down by her hair and stabs her throat. The sarcophagus was found in Gümüşçay in 1994 and dated to ca. 520-500 BC (Pedley 191-192). It is now in the Çannakkale Museum in Turkey, and images are available in John Griffiths Pedley's *Greek Art and Archaeology* (192, figure 6.70) and online, through Oxford's Beazley Archive: <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/sculpture/styles/grave6.htm>.

involve the living.¹⁷⁹ To return to the example of Euripides' *Electra*, Orestes reports that he covered his eyes during his offstage murder of Clytemnestra:

ἐγὼ μὲν ἐπιβαλὼν φάρη κόραις ἐμαῖς

φασγάνῳ κατηξάμαν

ματέρος ἔσω δέρας μεθείς. (1221-1223)

[I, casting my garments before my eyes, began the slaughter with my sword, releasing it into my mother's neck.]

Orestes explains to the Chorus that this measure was what allowed him to endure the killing of his mother, and though the characters do not suggest it explicitly, it is also possible that this gesture is one of shielding himself from the sight of his polluting slaughter of his mother. In *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Agamemnon, too, is reported to cover his face before shedding kindred blood: “ὀμμάτων πέπλον προθείς” [...casting his cloak before his eyes] (1550). Here, the messenger interprets this gesture as one of grief upon seeing his daughter just before the sacrifice, but as in *Electra*, it may also carry a sense of hiding oneself and avoiding a horrifying, perhaps polluting, sight.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ In addition to the reasons I will discuss below, tragedy also includes examples of people covering themselves out of modesty (e.g. Iphigenia says that she was veiled when she went to what she thought was her marriage to Achilles, in Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 372-376) or grief (e.g. Hecuba lies wrapped in her garments from the beginning of Euripides' *Hecuba*, as Talthybius notices at 486-487).

¹⁸⁰ Euripides' *Orestes* features a very similar example: as Orestes returns to his senses after his frenzied struggle with the Furies, real or imagined, he asks Electra why she is weeping and covering her head with her clothes, then tells her to uncover her head and stop weeping (280, 294-295). Since Electra was covering her head during Orestes' fit, this gesture probably indicates grief and despair, but like these other examples, she may also be shielding herself from her brother's madness or torment by the Furies. The Polyxena Sarcophagus also makes an interesting comparison: the man who stabs Polyxena's throat looks directly into her face, with boldness and violence that make the scene very unsettling, at least to modern viewers, but the other men who hold her

This conjecture becomes more attractive in light of the examples of *Iphigenia among the Taurians* and *Heracles*. In these plays, characters explicitly discuss the need to hide themselves, or others, from seeing polluted people, and indeed, Iphigenia's trick of the barbarian king Thoas in Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* relies on an understanding that proximity to and sight of those polluted by murder can spread the pollution.¹⁸¹

After Iphigenia comes to recognize Orestes and Pylades, the three Greeks develop a plan for escaping from the barbarians. Iphigenia comes outside the temple, carrying the statue of Artemis and explaining, on the authority of her role as priestess, that the men provided as sacrificial victims were not pure: “οὐ καθαρὰ μοι τὰ θύματ' ἡγρεύσασθ', ἄναξ” [The offerings you captured for me are not clean, King.] (1163). When Thoas asks how she knows that, she claims that the statue turned away from them, and Thoas continues with a suggestion that he picks up from Iphigenia's earlier claim: “ἢ δ' αἰτία τίς; ἢ τὸ τῶν ξένων μύσος;” [What was the reason? Was it the defilement of the foreigners?] (1168). Thoas answers his own question with the very

look at each other or back to the people standing behind them (mourning women and an older man, possibly Nestor), pointedly not at Polyxena.

¹⁸¹ Well before the recognition scene and subsequent scheming, the play introduces the concept of pollution when Iphigenia questions whether Artemis truly wants human sacrifices, or whether the barbarians use her as an excuse for their own murderous tendencies. She expresses the conflict she sees: “...whoever of mortals has come into contact with murder or childbirth or a corpse by touching with hands, she keeps from her altars, holding him unclean, but she herself enjoys human sacrifices!” (381-84). This early mention of pollution in the play is useful for introducing the idea and showing that, in this world, the standard concerns about keeping the pollutions of murder, birth, and death separate from the gods do hold.

conclusion that Iphigenia has already suggested, thus showcasing her prowess as a trickster: she has planted an idea that Thoas now seems to think is his own.¹⁸²

As the scene continues (lines 1157-1233), Iphigenia leads Thoas further along into a full conviction that proximity to people polluted by such murder can spread that pollution and that the goddess's statue, Thoas, and the people of the city are all at risk from this contagion. She explains that the two men killed their mother, and Thoas asks: "Is it for this reason that you bring the statue outside?" [ἢ τῶνδ' ἕκατι δῆτ' ἄγαλμ' ἔξω φέρεις;] (1176). "Yes," she says, "[I bring it] into the holy air so that I might remove it from the murder" [σεμνόν γ' ὑπ' αἰθέρ', ὥς μεταστήσω φόνου] (1177). Again, Thoas is now making the suggestion himself, and he has adopted the fundamental premise that Iphigenia needs to support the demands she will make: he accepts that proximity to those polluted by murder would also pollute the goddess's statue. After assuring the king that she still intends to complete the sacrifice, Iphigenia explains that she first needs to purify her ritual equipment and the sacrifices (the two Greeks) by washing them in the sea (1191-1194). Thoas accepts each of her new conditions to the purification requirements, as she demands solitude (1197), adds the goddess's statue to the group of items needing purification (1199), asks him to have the men bound (1204), and requires that the men's faces be veiled:

Iphigenia: κρᾶτα κρύψαντες πέπλοισιν.

Thoas: ἡλίου πρόσθεν φλογός. (1207)

[Iphigenia: ...hiding/covering their heads with their garments.]

¹⁸² This is a very common strategy for trickster characters and others engaged in manipulation. For an example outside of the Greek context, see Iago's manipulation of Othello in Shakespeare's *Othello*, such as in Act III, scene 3.

Thoas: Before the light of the sun.]

By this point in the stichomythia, Thoas has assimilated Iphigenia's line of reasoning and is able to complete her lines, anticipating her requests and the reasons behind them. Continuing this thread, Iphigenia asks further that he announce to the city that everyone should remain inside, and again, he adds the explanation for the instruction: "μὴ συναντῶσιν φόνῳ;" [...so that they do not come face to face with murder?] (1210). Finally completing her quest to ensure that no one could see their escape, Iphigenia ultimately instructs Thoas himself to cover his eyes, supposedly for his own protection:

{Ιφ.} ἥνίκ' ἄν δ' ἔξω περῶσιν οἱ ξένοι

{Θο.} τί χρή με δρᾶν;

{Ιφ.} πέπλον ὀμμάτων προθέσθαι.

{Θο.} μὴ παλαμναίους βλέπω.¹⁸³ (1217-1218)

[Iphigenia: When the foreigners come outside...

Thoas: What should I do?

Iphigenia: ...cast your garments over your eyes.

Thoas: So that I might not look upon those stained with blood-guilt.]

By gradually leading him into an understanding of murder-pollution as contagious, Iphigenia has guaranteed secrecy and plenty of time for their escape.

The role of pollution fears in Iphigenia's trick is a complex one. On the one hand, concerns about pollution were widespread in the Greek world, though likely

¹⁸³ An alternate manuscript reading of this text still yields a similar meaning: "μὴ παλαμναῖον λάβω" [So that I might not take on blood-guilt].

quite varied, so Iphigenia's reasoning about the dangers of contagion seems legitimate (Parker 34). On the other hand, given that she is tricking a barbarian who, for the dramaturgical purposes of the play, functions as both a villain and a buffoon, the scene would also work well if the audience is skeptical of this theory of contagion and can thus laugh at Thoas' readiness to accept her explanations.¹⁸⁴ In either case, the scene does seem to assume that the audience is aware that such pollution concerns exist, though the question remains as to whether the majority of the spectators would consider those concerns to be deeply real and immediate to their own lives or a vestige of the past heroic age that no longer applies in a literal, direct way.¹⁸⁵

Regardless of the degree to which fifth-century spectators might have taken pollution fears seriously, the tragedies, with their setting in the heroic age, certainly do treat them so. Iphigenia's precautionary, and expedient for her own purposes, measures to prevent the spread of pollution emanating from matricides support the concerns about pollution that emerge less explicitly in other contexts, as when characters report having covered their eyes while killing or when they quickly cover

¹⁸⁴ For a very similar scene, compare Helen's tricking of the barbarian king Theoclymenus in Euripides' *Helen* 1184-1300. Here, Helen succeeds by exploiting two primary weaknesses: Theoclymenus' overwhelming desire for her and his ignorance of Greek customs. She and Menelaus can ask for anything they need by couching it as a requirement for proper, ritual burial for those who die at sea.

¹⁸⁵ In *Honor Thy Gods*, Jon D. Mikalson is skeptical of whether the average Athenian would have worried about literal pollution from an unburied body. In a discussion of Teiresias' warnings in *Antigone* 1015-1022, Mikalson considers this problem: "We might like to think that average Athenians had in mind such a pat explanation of the relationship between burial rites, pollution, and the goodwill of the gods. There is, however, only slight evidence elsewhere that such an explanation was widely known or generally accepted. No doubt the interrelationship of burial rites, sin, pollution, and the gods of the living and dead was recognized by the average person, but it was hardly understood or articulated in this way" (128).

corpses or cover themselves in the presence of a polluted, or potentially polluted, person. Euripides' *Heracles* provides a less ambiguous example of concerns about pollution through contact or vision even than *Iphigenia among the Taurians*: like Iphigenia and Thoas, Heracles and Theseus clearly understand Heracles' pollution from slaughtering his family to be contagious, yet here there is no hint that we should be skeptical of such a belief.

As Heracles awakens from the sleep that immediately follows his murderous rampage, he wonders why his father, Amphitryon, is weeping and covering or closing his eyes: “πάτερ, τί κλαίεις καὶ συναμπίσχη κόρας” [Father, why do you weep and keep back your eyes?] (1111). Amphitryon may be covering his eyes simply as a gesture of grief, but his drawing back from his son also indicates his fear that Heracles might attack him again and possibly also his desire to separate himself from the horrors of Heracles' crime and the destruction of his family. Amphitryon's gesture, however, is of minor importance by comparison with Heracles' covering himself as he realizes his crimes, though this first example functions well as a precursor to the later gesture.

When Heracles finally realizes that he has killed his wife and children in a fit of madness, he laments his position and considers how he might kill himself, but as he sees Theseus approach, he quickly moves to concern for his friend:

ἀλλ' ἐμποδὼν μοι θανασίμων βουλευμάτων
Θησεὺς ὅδ' ἔρπει συγγενῆς φίλος τ' ἐμός.
1155 ὀφθησόμεσθα, καὶ τεκνοκτόνον μύσος
ἐς ὄμμαθ' ἤξει φιλτάτῳ ξένων ἐμῶν.

οἵμοι, τί δράσω; ποῖ κακῶν ἐρημίαν
εὖρω, πτερωτὸς ἢ κατὰ χθονὸς μολών;
φέρ', ἀμφὶ κρατὶ περιβάλω <πέπλων> σκότον.

1160 αἰσχύνομαι γὰρ τοῖς δεδραμένοις κακοῖς,
καὶ τῷδε προστρόπαιον αἷμα προσβαλὼν
οὐδὲν κακῶσαι τοὺς ἀναιτίους θέλω. (1153-1162)

[But, an impediment to my resolutions of death, here Theseus comes,
my relative and friend. I will be seen [ὀφθησόμεσθα], and the
defilement for child-slaughter will come to the eyes [ὄμμαθ'] for my
dearest of guest-friends! Alas, what should I do? Where might I find
isolation from my evils/misfortunes: flying or going beneath the earth?
Come, let me cast around my head the darkness [σκότον] of garments!
For I am ashamed by the evils done, and I do not want to harm/foul the
innocent, casting onto him the blood pollution.]

With these words, Heracles gives one of the most explicit and compelling expressions of pollution fears in extant tragedy.¹⁸⁶ Not only does Heracles understand pollution from kindred murder to be attached to himself, but he also fears that this pollution could stain the friend who sees him. Though he talks of flying off or going under the earth to avoid contact with his friend, the practical action he takes in response to the situation is to cover his head with his clothing. Since he cannot physically remove

¹⁸⁶ Sophocles' *Antigone* would compete for this honor, with Teiresias' report that the birds and dogs have scattered bits of Polynices' body on the altars, preventing prayer and sacrifice with a very literal spreading of pollution from the unburied corpse (1015-1022).

himself, he can at least cover himself to prevent Theseus from seeing him. Visual perception is thus one form of polluting contact, an avenue more easily obstructed than physical proximity, and Heracles' use of visual words in this speech ("ὀφθησόμεσθα," 1155; "ὄμμαθ'," 1156; "σκότον," 1159) emphasize the potential of that medium to pass on pollution.

Theseus, however, has come to help his friend and is not content to leave him lying on the ground, wrapped in his clothes.

{Θη.} ἀλλ' εἰ συναλγῶν γ' ἦλθον; ἐκκάλυπτε νιν.

{Αμ.} ὦ τέκνον,

πάρες ἀπ' ὀμμάτων πέπλον, ἀπόδике, ῥέθος

ἀελίῳ δεῖξον. (1202-1204)

[Theseus: But if I have come sharing in his suffering? Uncover him.

Amphitryon: O son, let fall the garment from your eyes, throw it off, show your face to the sun.]

When Heracles refuses to give in to Amphitryon's pleading, Theseus appeals to him directly:

εἶέν· σὲ τὸν θάσσοντα δυστήνους ἔδρας

1215 αὐδῶ φίλοισιν ὄμμα δεικνύναι τὸ σόν.

οὐδεὶς σκότος γὰρ ὧδ' ἔχει μέλαν νέφος

ὅστις κακῶν σῶν συμφορὰν κρύψειεν ἄν.

τί μοι προσείων χεῖρα σημαίνεις φόβον;

ὥς μὴ μύσος με σῶν βάλη προσφθεγμάτων;

1220 οὐδὲν μέλει μοι σὺν γε σοὶ πράσσειν κακῶς·

....

ἀνίστασ', ἐκκάλυψον ἄθλιον κάρα,

βλέψον πρὸς ἡμᾶς... (1214-1220, 1226-1227)

[Well then; I call to you, sitting in the wretched seat, to show your face (literally “eye,” ὄμμα) to friends. For no darkness holds so dark a cloud as to hide the misfortune of your evils. Why do you sign fear to me, holding out your hand? Fearing that you might cast pollution onto me, addressing me? [Theseus continues, arguing that he owes gratitude to Heracles for bringing him out of Hades.] Stand up, uncover your miserable head, look at me.]

Heracles does uncover himself, and Theseus acknowledges that he now shows the full evil to his eyes (1230). Heracles remains concerned about his contagious pollution:

{Hr.} τί δῆτά μου κρᾶτ' ἀνεκάλυψας ἡλίῳ;

{Θη.} τί δ'; οὐ μιαίνεις θνητὸς ὦν τὰ τῶν θεῶν.

{Hr.} φεῦγ', ὦ ταλαίπωρ', ἀνόσιον μίασμ' ἐμόν.

{Θη.} οὐδεὶς ἀλάστωρ τοῖς φίλοις ἐκ τῶν φίλων. (1231-1234)

[Heracles: Why, then, did you uncover my head to the sun?

Theseus: Why? You, being a mortal, do not pollute the things of the gods.

Heracles: Flee, o wretched man, from my unholy pollution/disease!

Theseus: There is no avenger for friends from friends.]

While he does argue that Heracles will not pollute the gods by revealing his face to the air, Theseus does not actually deny that the murderer is polluted, and his primary point

of argument is not that the pollution could not travel to others at all, but that he himself is willing to face such a risk because he owes such a debt of gratitude to the one who brought him out of Hades.

Rather than deny the pollution, Theseus takes the sort of approach that Robert Parker sees in Pylades' willingness to accompany the polluted Orestes in Euripides' *Orestes*: "Pylades does not deny but disregards the dangers in the act of friendship; we might compare the action of 'those who laid some claim to virtue' in nursing their friends during the Athenian plague" (309). Similarly, Theseus acknowledges the gravity of the situation but chooses to help his friend begin the process of purification. An important component of murder-pollution is, as Parker explains, "social stigma," and Theseus' insistence on contact with Heracles serves as a first step towards overcoming this stigma, "showing him that he is not, after all, wholly cut off from his fellow men. With infinite delicacy he persuades Heracles to confront the outside world, first passively by sight, then by speech, and finally by actual physical contact with one who is not polluted" (317).

In his extensive study of pollution and purification, *Miasma*, Robert Parker, like Mary Douglas in her broader study, focuses on the need to separate things that should not be together, such as the sacred and the polluted. In the case of murder-pollution, such as that in *Heracles*, social stigma is essentially an application of that broader concept to the context of social relations:¹⁸⁷ the polluted person must be kept

¹⁸⁷ Explaining the distinction between "natural" pollutions such as childbirth and such unnatural pollutions as murder, Parker writes: "All these pollutions are produced by breaches of order, but the source of disturbance is quite distinct in the different cases. Murder-pollution is caused by an unnatural act, and for this reason is virtually

separated from the rest of the community. Pollution might travel from the murderer to others by physical contact or proximity, or even by the fact of kinship, as it seems to do on the occasion of a death (Parker 39). Physical contact and proximity are natural choices for avenues of pollution contagion, given the logic of separation that governs pollution concerns generally, but the gesture of covering or uncovering the face in tragedy points towards visual perception as a particularly strong mode of pollution transfer. If physical proximity alone could fully pollute a bystander, why would Heracles bother to cover himself when Theseus approaches, or why would Thoas consider it sufficient protection simply to cover himself and the matricides?

Visual perception seems to be more dangerous than simple proximity, though it might be a step removed from direct physical contact. If this is the case, the question naturally follows: what is it about visual perception specifically that might be so dangerous? Why would polluted people take care to cover themselves, and why would others avoid looking at them? Why, for that matter, should people avoid looking at corpses? An answer to these questions, I suggest, may be found through an examination of the Greeks' understanding of how visual perception actually happens.

Perception in the Ancient World: Mechanics and Implications

As is the case with so many topics, we have no way of knowing what the average Greek in the fifth century BC thought about the mechanics of perception. The

identified, as we saw, with the anger of the man unnaturally killed. This anger then directs itself in ways that in theory enforce the expulsion of the killer from the community. Birth- and death-pollution, by contrast, merely cause those most affected to lie low for a while" (125).

issue was certainly of interest to philosophers, but most texts dealing directly with the nature and processes of perception either do not survive or come from a period later than that of our extant tragedies. Plato and Aristotle, for example, constructed detailed theories for sense perception, but they wrote well after the deaths of the three tragedians whose plays survive.¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, I would propose that an examination of the surviving philosophical texts can still give us some sense of the major theories that were under discussion in the fourth century, while fragments and summaries found in the work of later writers help to illuminate the theories of the Presocratics¹⁸⁹ in the fifth century, contemporary with the surviving tragedies. Although may not be able to determine exactly what the average, non-philosopher, “Greeks-on the-street” might have thought, I suggest that some basic ideas form a trend through most of the philosophical treatises on the subject, and as a result of their predominance, they may point towards a general way of thinking about perception that the tragedians and their audiences may have accepted, even if they did not engage in intense philosophical debate about the subject.

¹⁸⁸ A few example dates should provide some sense of the time scale here: Sophocles and Euripides died in 406 BC; Plato wrote his *Timaeus*, which provides his most detailed theory of vision, ca. 360 BC; the dates of Aristotle’s *De Sensu* and *De Anima* [*On the Soul*] are uncertain, but they were likely products of his time leading the Lyceum in Athens, 334-323 BC.

¹⁸⁹ “Presocratic” is a problematic term, not the least because Democritus, one of the most important of the philosophers considered a “Presocratic,” was roughly contemporary with Socrates and actually survived him by approximately thirty years. Some scholars in the field now advocate for using the term “early Greek philosophers” in place of “Presocratics,” but the latter term is still dominant. David T. Runia notes that “Presocratic” existed as a concept even in the ancient world and that, despite its problems, it will probably remain the primary scholarly term, at least as long as Hermann Diels’s editions of the fragments continue to be the standard reference (Runia 28).

Theories of Perception: The Presocratics

Unfortunately, most of the writings of the Presocratic philosophers have been lost, leaving only fragments and summaries in later writers, which we can sometimes piece together for a sense of the original texts. Theophrastus, a successor of Aristotle, wrote a treatise on sense perception, *On the Senses*,¹⁹⁰ that includes summaries of the earlier theories of Empedocles, Democritus, Alcmaeon, Anaxagoras, and others, but this text, too, survives only as a large fragment and in summaries by even later writers, such as Priscian of Lydia.¹⁹¹ Despite these complications, such doxographies by later writers, which typically include paraphrases of earlier texts and sometimes also the writers' own criticisms, are our best sources for the Presocratics.¹⁹²

Perception theories of the Presocratics are of interest for our current study primarily as a result of being roughly contemporary with tragedy. While our understanding of these theories necessarily involves some conjecture and potentially

¹⁹⁰ The Latin title is *De Sensibus*, and the Greek is Περὶ αἰσθήσεων. The title Περὶ αἰσθήσεως also appears in manuscripts, but the plural is more common. See H. Baltussen, *Theophrastus against the Presocratics and Plato*, p. 2, n. 1 for more on the title.

¹⁹¹ Priscian was a Neoplatonist in the sixth century AD. Many of his works likewise do not survive, but part of his summary of Theophrastus' *On the Senses* is extant. See Priscian, *On Theophrastus on Sense-Perception*, Trans. Pamela Huby (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997). The surviving sections focus on Theophrastus' account of Aristotle's *On the Soul*, which survives independently.

¹⁹² For the sake of expediency, I will not dwell further on the complications of manuscript traditions and transmission, but a good introduction to these issues is available in David T. Runia's "The Sources for Presocratic Philosophy" and, for Theophrastus specifically, in H. Bertussen's "General Introduction" to *Theophrastus against the Presocratics and Plato*. Runia's essay is the first chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy*, pages 27-54, and he provides a thorough explanation of both the ancient sources and the more recent transmission history, particularly through Hermann Diels's *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. For Bertussen, see especially pages 2-4 and 12-15.

uncritical or forced selectivity, we do have a sense of some of the major ideas in circulation. I will not attempt to summarize every theory here, but by way of a sample, I will briefly discuss the theories of Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Democritus.

According to Theophrastus, Empedocles explains:

...perception occurs because something fits into the passages [εἰς τοὺς πόρους] of the particular <sense organ>. For this reason the senses cannot discern one another's objects, he holds, because the passages of some <of the sense-organs> are too wide for the object, and those of others are too narrow. And consequently some <of these objects> hold their course through without contact [οὐκ ἀπτόμενα], while others are quite unable to enter. (*On the Senses*, section 7)¹⁹³

This theory of perception is based on the understanding, common to many of the atomists, that all objects emit some sort of “effluence,” and so these effluences encounter all parts of a perceiver's body, providing usable perceptual data only when they enter the pores [πόροι] in the appropriate sense organ.¹⁹⁴ A. A. Long summarizes

¹⁹³ Translation by George Malcolm Stratton, in *Theophrastus and the Greek Physiological Psychology before Aristotle* (p. 71). His Greek text of *On the Senses* is that of Hermann Diels's *Doxographi Graeci*, with a few minor changes. Brackets indicate words supplied from context, without corresponding words in the Greek. Although Bertussen has noted some problems with Stratton's text, translation, and commentary, the new edition by André Laks and Glenn W. Most that Bertussen anticipated in 2000 has yet to appear, though Laks has published editions of other Theophrastean texts (Bertussen 13, 3).

¹⁹⁴ See David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from al-Kindi to Kepler*: “To be sure, within the atomic school there was considerable diversity of opinion, and it would be gross error to suppose that atomists from Leucippus to Lucretius spoke with a single voice. Nevertheless, there was a significant core of agreement, springing from the common premise that all sensation is caused by direct contact with the organ of sense

the essential components of Empedocles' theory in "Thinking and Sense-Perception in Empedocles": "But an essential property of all bodies—all temporary compounds of elements—is the production of ἀπορροαί, effluences; 'knowing that there are effluences from all things which have come into being', ὅσσ' ἐγένοντο (B89). The function of πόροι is the reception of ἀπορροαί. In this process we have the essence of Empedocles' theory of perception..." (259-260). There must be some fundamental similarity between the effluences and the pores of a particular sense organ in order for perception to occur, creating a qualification of "like to like" for perception.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, as Long explains, a particular medium may be required as a precondition for each sense, such as fire (i.e., light) for vision or sound (air) for hearing (264). Thus, perception would occur only when an effluence travels through a particular medium to reach the corresponding sense organ's pores.

Empedocles' theory implies a sort of contact between perceiver and perceived: something emanates from an object in the environment, travels through a medium, and enters into "pores" in a perceiver's sense organ. Indeed, Theophrastus succinctly reduces Empedocles' larger theory to two factors: "to likeness and to contact" [τῷ τε ὁμοίῳ καὶ τῇ ἀφῇ] (*On the Senses*, section 15, trans. Stratton). The importance of a sort of contact to all modes of perception becomes problematic in the cases of touch and taste, since these two rely on direct physical contact, and if all senses involve some form of contact, it would seem that all senses have been reduced to touch. A. A.

and therefore that a material effluence must be conveyed from the visible object to the eye" (2).

¹⁹⁵ Plato's theory of vision is based on the same basic idea, as we will see in the following section.

Long discusses this problem, which troubled the ancient philosophers as well, but he concludes that for Empedocles, direct physical contact may be the necessary precondition for touch and taste, just as light or sound might be preconditions for seeing and hearing (266). Regardless of the precise nature of each type of contact, though, all modes of perception in Empedocles' theory do involve some kind of contact between perceiver and perceived, as effluences penetrate a sense organ through the pores, and this, for our purposes, is the key idea of this theory.

The perception theory of Anaxagoras, who flourished at approximately the same time as Empedocles, in the fifth century BC, is noteworthy primarily because it relies on the meeting of opposites, rather than like with like. Theophrastus summarizes:

Anaxagoras holds that sense perception comes to pass by means of opposites, for the like is unaffected by the like. He then essays to review each sense separately. Accordingly he maintains that seeing is due to the reflection in the pupil, but that nothing is reflected in what is of like hue, but only in what is of a different hue. All sense perception, he holds, is fraught with pain, —which would seem in keeping with his general principle, for the unlike when brought in contact <with our organs> always brings distress. (*On the Senses*, sections 27, 29)

Theophrastus has no patience for the idea that sense perception always involves pain, though he does find some value in the idea of opposites (section 31). Although Anaxagoras proposes that perception occurs through opposites rather than through

fundamentally similar bodies, his understanding of the transmission process itself seems to be very similar to Empedocles'. Indeed, Theophrastus understands this to be the case: "In making the correspondence between <the senses and> their objects depend on size, Anaxagoras seems to be speaking after the manner of Empedocles, who explains sense perception by the supposition that <emanations> fit into the passages <of sense>" (section 35, trans. Stratton). Thus, while the theories of Empedocles and Anaxagoras would seem to be diametrically opposed, the underlying concept of perception by means of effluences and a sort of contact remains in each.

Finally, we will turn to Democritus, to whom Theophrastus grants the most attention in his *On the Senses*.¹⁹⁶ According to Theophrastus, it is unclear whether Democritus' theory involves opposites or like with like, which prevents our making a simple comparison with those of Empedocles and Anaxagoras (section 49). However, Theophrastus does provide a summary of Democritus' theory for each sense, beginning with vision:

Vision he explains by the reflection <in the eye> of which he gives a unique account. For the reflection does not arise immediately in the pupil. On the contrary, the air between the eye and the object of sight [τοῦ ὁρωμένου: literally, "thing seen"] is compressed by the object and the visual organ, and thus becomes imprinted [τυποῦσθαι]; since there

¹⁹⁶ According to Stratton, Theophrastus deals with eight philosophers, but of the 91 sections of *On the Senses*, discussions of Democritus extend for 34 sections. This is in comparison to eighteen sections on Empedocles, about ten each to Diogenes, Anaxagoras, and Plato, and only one or two for each of the others (51-52).

is always an effluence of some kind [τινα ἀπορροήν] arising from everything. (section 50, trans. Stratton)

Again, this theory relies on the understanding that all objects continuously emit effluences of some sort, as well as that some kind of contact takes place between perceiver and perceived, which is particularly vivid here in the image of imprinting.

In “Democritus on Visual Perception: Two Theories or One?”, Richard W. Baldes undertakes a study of the accounts of Democritus provided in both Theophrastus and Aristotle. He explains that some scholars have been tempted to reconcile seemingly contradictory accounts by positing two separate theories of perception for Democritus, one involving a visual that comes out of the eye to meet an image coming out of an object and a second involving a “midair air impression,” in which a visual ray from the eye and an image from the object meet in midair and create to create an impression (94). As this summary of the two proposed theories suggests, these are not, in fact, necessarily divergent ideas, and Baldes argues that Democritus taught only one theory, and the accounts we have in Theophrastus and Aristotle appear to be incompatible in some respects simply because those philosophers are discussing different aspects of the theory. Aristotle, he argues, is concerned with “how the ‘image’ is *transferred* from the physical object to the eye,” while Theophrastus “is reporting on what happens to the image at the percipient” (99). Democritus, Baldes proposes, does not consider the “thing seen,” which comes together with the eye to create an imprint, to be a physical object in the world but rather an image or effluence coming from that object (100).

Working from his identification of the “thing seen” as an effluence, Baldes details Democritus’ theory of the process of visual perception: “As the image gets very close to the eye, some air is trapped there between it and the eye; this trapped air is compressed against the eye by the momentum of the oncoming image and there also receives the imprint from the image” (100-101). Thus, Democritus’ theory does not necessarily rely on a visual ray proceeding from the eye or on a “midair” impression, though it does demand the production of an “impression” or “imprint.” Rather, as Baldes asserts, this theory involves the production of this imprint *at* the percipient. “Theophrastus,” he says, “does not mention travel of this air impression to the eye precisely because no such travel is involved” (101).

Baldes’s refinement of the reconstruction of Democritus’ theory of vision creates an even stronger sense of contact between perceiver and perceived than we might initially understand from Theophrastus’ summary. This intensification of contact, however, explains much better than the “midair impression” idea why Aristotle would criticize Democritus so strongly for reducing all the senses to touch. In his treatise *On Sense Perception*, Aristotle complains: “Democritus and most of the physical philosophers who treat of sensation commit a most senseless blunder. They identify all sense qualities with the tactual. It is clear that if this were true each of the other senses would be a sort of touch; but it is not difficult to see that this is impossible” (442a-b, trans. G. R. T. Ross). For Aristotle, the theories of Democritus and like-minded philosophers figure all the senses as, in some way, tactile, due to a process we now term “intromissionist”: effluences from an object enter into the sense organ of the perceiver.

Although our understandings of the Presocratic theories are fraught with complications and uncertainties, the works of later writers do give us glimpses of those earlier ideas. As this brief survey of Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Democritus has shown, the theories of the Presocratics may have differed in the exact processes they constructed for perception, yet they generally involve some common underlying concepts. Whether like meets like or opposite meets opposite, some kind of effluence comes out from objects in the environment to meet the appropriate sense organ. These theories rely upon some concept of atoms, that is, particles that can make up the effluences, as well as upon a moment of contact between those particles and the perceiver.¹⁹⁷ Taking these as the central concepts of Presocratic perception theories, we can now continue to Plato and then to Aristotle, where we may at least enjoy more complete and reliable texts.

Theories of Perception: Plato

Despite the gap of perhaps forty years between the deaths of Sophocles and Euripides and the writing of his *Timaeus* dialogue, Plato remains our best, closest, surviving source for philosophical theories of perception during tragedy's heyday. The most sustained and detailed discussion of perception in Plato comes in the late dialogue *Timaeus*, which gives Plato's most comprehensive discussion of the nature of the universe, including a creation story. According to this story of the creation of the universe, the gods shaped humans with a front and a back, and on the front of the head

¹⁹⁷ See Lindberg, p. 2-3 for more on the underlying similarities of the theories of the atomists.

they attached organs “for every foreknowledge of the soul” [πάση τῇ τῆς ψυχῆς προνοίᾳ], starting with the “light-bearing eyes” [φωσφόρα... ὄμματα] (45B). Plato explains that these eyes were made from a gentle type of the basic element of fire, a substance similar to daylight. Vision, then, works through a fusion of the fire found in a visual ray coming out of the eye with the fire in the light:

Whenever then there is daylight surrounding the current of vision, then this issues forth as like into like, and coalescing with the light is formed into one uniform substance in the direct line of vision, wherever the stream issuing from within strikes upon some external object that falls in its way. So the whole from its uniformity becomes sympathetic; and whenever it comes in contact with anything else, or anything with it, it passes on the motions thereof over the whole body until they reach the soul, and thus causes that sensation which we call seeing. (45C-D)¹⁹⁸

This is basically what we now call an “extramissionist” theory of vision: the eye actually sends out a visual ray, rather than simply receiving light or other information from the environment, and the fusion of the common element (fire) of the ray and the environmental light sends back motions that pass through the eyes to the soul. This model suggests a strong connection between the seer and the object seen, and indeed Plato elsewhere explains that the subject and object have a mutually dependent relationship, as perception itself makes one into the percipient and the other into a percept. In his explanation of colors in the *Theaetetus*, he concludes that subject

¹⁹⁸ This translation is by R. D. Archer-Hind in his *The Timaeus of Plato*. All quotations from *Timaeus* are from Archer-Hind’s translation.

and object (here, “active” and “passive”) are so only in relation to one another: “For even in the case of the active and passive motions it is impossible, as they say, for thought, taking them singly, to pin them down to being anything. There is no passive till it meets the active, no active except in conjunction with the passive; and what, in conjunction with one thing, is active, reveals itself as passive when it falls in with something else” (157a).¹⁹⁹

As R.D. Archer-Hind summarizes, “subject and object are inseparably correlated and exist only in mutual connection—subject cannot be percipient without object, nor object generate a percept without subject” (21-22). Further, as Archer-Hind continues, “...subject as well as object is undergoing perpetual mutation: thus, since a change either of object or of subject singly involves a change in the perception, every perception is continually suffering a twofold alteration. Perception is therefore an ever-flowing stream, incessantly changing its character in correspondence with the changes in subject and in object” (22). Thus Plato figures perception, first vision and then the other forms of sensory perception, to be a powerful connecting force, a “stream” that transforms both subject and object and is in continuous motion and change.

The purpose of vision and the other senses, according to Plato, is to allow humans to perceive the movements of the stars and so that “learning them [the heavenly orbits] and acquiring natural truth of reasoning we might imitate the divine movements that are ever unerring and bring into order those within us which are all astray” (*Timaeus* 47B-C). Essentially, the point of perception is that it allows us to be

¹⁹⁹ Translation is by M. J. Levett, Revised by Myles Burnyeat (p. 21).

philosophers. The difficulty, however, is that perception does not always provide accurate information, and it can sometimes be subjective. In *Theaetetus*, this problem of subjectivity leads to the conclusion that perception does not yield knowledge at all (186e). Furthermore, in *Philebus*, Plato details the problem of false perception, which might involve a problem in the communication of sensory information or in the judgments made from the information itself (38E-39C).

Here we come to the consequences of Plato's distinctions between specific parts of the "soul." In Book X of *The Republic*, Plato, through the mouthpiece of the dialogue's character Socrates, makes an important distinction between two parts of the soul [ψυχή]. One part, he explains, approaches things rationally, by measuring, counting, weighing, and reasoning. This part would, for example, measure two objects to decide which is the larger. The other part, however, tends to be persuaded by mere appearances and can be much more easily deceived, often thinking that one object is larger than another even though it is in fact smaller (603A). This second part is also that which tends to express strong emotions, rather than behaving in a more contained and reasoned way.

In other contexts, Plato might figure the soul as having three or four parts, but for his ideas about perception, it is this distinction between the rational part and what we might term the emotional part that is significant. If the emotional part (the "inferior" part, by Plato's description) is more easily deceived by appearances, we might conclude that this would be the part that would engage directly in perception. The second part, then, might be involved in the rational, cognitive process of judgment that would follow the basic process of perception (αἰσθήσις). As we might expect,

then, Plato's understanding of the process of perception does seem to involve two different stages, though their boundaries may be blurry.

In the *Philebus*, Plato's Socrates imagines the soul as a papyrus roll and explains that "memory, sense-perceptions, and their attendant processes combine, as it were, to write propositions on our souls" (39A). Next, a "designer" paints illustrations on the soul: "a man detaches the judgments he has once formed and uttered from the impression of sight (or other sense), and, so to say, contemplates the images within himself of the old judgments and propositions" (39B-C).²⁰⁰ Basically, Plato's model includes some kind of rational, cognitive process that joins memories and reason with the perceptual information to form judgments or beliefs (δόξαι).

So on the one hand, perception allows people to gather information about the world, to philosophize, and, a important point for Plato with his theory of forms, to connect in some way, imperfect though it may be, with the true, universal soul or good. On the other hand, perception can be false or deceptive, and there are several steps in which a mistake could yield false perceptions or false judgments. In his study of several major terms in Plato's perception theories, Jeffrey Barnouw, here working primarily from Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, summarizes what he terms the "predicative nature of perception" found in Plato, Aristotle, and the later Stoics as including "its internal structuring of what is perceived in propositional form *and* its intrinsic reality claim such that, if no overriding judgment supervenes, what is perceived is believed to be" (11). Essentially, the "propositional" aspect of perception is its capability of being true or false and thus requiring some proposition and

²⁰⁰ Translations from *Philebus* are by A. E. Taylor.

judgment. The important point that emerges here is that perception can result in either true or false judgments and that the default judgment tends to be an acceptance of the perceptual information as “true,” which complements Plato’s complaints about the “inferior” part of the soul in the *Republic*.

If the judgments resulting from perception can be either true or false, is one type of sense perception more reliable than another? If information from two different senses, such as seeing and hearing, are in conflict, which one should the perceiver trust? For Plato, a partial answer may lie in the different models he constructs for the mechanics of seeing and hearing. We have already seen that he understands vision as involving a ray from the eye coalescing with daylight and bringing back motions from any object it strikes to the soul, and bit later in the *Timaeus*, Plato provides a brief description of each of the major sensory organs as part of a large discussion of the parts of the human body. For the ears and the sense of hearing, he explains:

Let us in general terms define sound as a stroke transmitted through the ears by the air and passed through the brain and the blood to the soul; while the motion produced by it, beginning in the head and ending in the region of the liver, is hearing. A rapid motion produces a shrill sound, a slower one a deeper sound; regular vibration gives an even and smooth sound, and the opposite a harsh one; if the movement is large, the sound is loud; if otherwise, it is slight. (67B)

By this model, then, sound, like visual percepts, is composed of some kind of motion or vibration, but in this case, nothing reaches out from the perceiver to the object perceived. The ear is rather a sort of funnel, which simply collects the

vibrations and passes them through to the soul. Because both hearing and seeing bring the perceptual information to the soul, both processes may involve the subsequent processing of information through cognitive, rational judgment. However, Plato's theory of vision involves a fusion of like with like that remains absent in his model of hearing. While any kind of perception might involve the risks of false perception and judgment, I would propose that vision, by Plato's understanding, is particularly susceptible to the dangers that concern him with respect to the "inferior" part of the soul and, as I will suggest later, with respect to mimetic poetry.

Theories of Perception: Aristotle

Though moving to Aristotle takes us even farther from the time of the original productions of the tragedies, we should nevertheless consider his contributions to theories of perception, particularly because he seems to refute so strongly the previous theories of Plato, Empedocles, and Democritus. His criticisms of Plato and the Presocratics further inform our understanding of the dominant theories of that period, and even Aristotle's very different theories share some fundamental perspectives with those of earlier philosophers. Despite his firm break with earlier theories, Aristotle's own construction retains a sense that perception can affect the perceiver, possibly even in a physical or material way.

Aristotle works through his theories of perception primarily in *On the Soul* and *On Sense-Perception*, with the latter being the more detailed study.²⁰¹ *On Sense-*

²⁰¹ The Greek titles are: *περὶ ψυχῆς* and *περὶ αἰσθήσεως καὶ αἰσθητῶν* [literally, "on perception and perceived objects"]. The Latin titles are: *De Anima* and *De Sensu*.

Perception features a strong refutation of extramission theory, as Aristotle breaks with the theories of his predecessors:

The theory is wholly absurd that sight is effected by means of something which issues from the eye and that it travels as far as the stars or, as some say, unites with something else after proceeding a certain distance. Than this latter a better theory would be, that the union is effected in the eye—the starting point; but even this is childish. What can the union of light with light mean? How can it come about? The union is not that of any chance light with any other chance light whatsoever. Again how can the internal light unite with the external?

The membrane of the eye divides them. (438a-b, trans. Ross)²⁰²

Aristotle clearly has little patience with the idea that rays with a substance of fire would travel out from the eye and coalesce with outside rays. His repudiation of extramission theory, however, does misread the earlier theories, to some extent, in that he blends his own conceptions of the eye and light itself with those of Plato and Empedocles, rather than evaluating the previous theories purely on their own terms.

In *Aristotle on the Sense-Organs*, T. K. Johansen explains Aristotle's complicated and problematic approach to the extramission theories. First of all, he seems to ignore that in the *Timaeus*, the presence of a membrane does not inhibit the movement of rays out of the eye:

²⁰² Translation is by G. R. T. Ross, *De Sensu and De Memoria* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1906), page 51.

There is no mention of a membrane separating the light inside from that outside the eye in the *Timaeus*. Timaeus said that the gods made the entire eye, and particularly the middle of the eye, ‘fine-webbed’ (ξύμπλήσαντες). That was why the coarser elements were kept back whereas the pure and smooth fire was allowed to leave the eyes. Timaeus had therefore made explicit provision for the composition of the entire eye to allow for the light inside to leave the eye and coalesce with the light outside. (60-61)

Despite Plato’s specific provision for the easy passage of light through the eye, Aristotle can base one aspect of his criticism of the extramission theory on the existence of a membrane because he has a different understanding of the composition of the eye and of light itself. Johansen points out that for Aristotle, light is not fire, though they are related, but rather a sort of actualization of the transparent (65).²⁰³ For the proponents of extramission theory, however, light is, essentially, fire and thus a body, which means that the bodies inside and outside the eye must be able to come into contact in order to coalesce and cause perception. According to Johansen, it is this contact that Aristotle argues the membrane would prevent, whereas for Aristotle’s own theory, “there is no problem with the membrane being in between the light outside and the transparent *korê* inside the eye, for what is needed for vision to take

²⁰³ In *On the Soul*, Aristotle defines light as: “...neither fire, nor in general any body, nor an emanation from any body (for in that case too it would be a body of some kind), but the presence of fire, or something of the kind, in the transparent; for there cannot be two bodies in the same place at the same time. Light is considered to be the contrary of darkness; but darkness is a removal from the transparent of the active condition described above, so that obviously light is the presence of this” (section 418b, lines 14-21, trans. W. S. Hett).

place is not a coalescence of bodies but a continuity of transparent bodies” (66).

Aristotle’s use of the membrane as the definitive factor in disproving extramission theory thus relies on a combination of assumptions adopted by the extramissionists and assumptions from his own metaphysics. Nevertheless, this strong, somewhat ridiculing, refutation of the earlier theory serves as a clear separation of Aristotle from his predecessors.²⁰⁴

If he utterly rejects extramission, what, then, does Aristotle propose for the process of visual perception? In simplistic terms, his theory can be termed one of “intromission,” meaning that something comes into the eye rather than coming out of it. As G. R. T. Ross summarizes in his introduction to the *De Sensu and De Memoria*, objects “whether, when in contact with it, or at a distance, act upon this organism and produce changes, whether mechanical (mere φορά), or qualitative (ἀλλοίωσις), in certain of its members. The reception of these changes in the sense organ *is* perception” (6-7, italics are Ross’s). More specifically, Aristotle’s theory is based on the importance of the medium that comes between the eye and the object, as he explains in *On Sense-Perception*: “We have elsewhere stated that vision without light is impossible; but whether it is light or air that intervenes between the object seen and the eye, it is the motion propagated through this that produces sight” (438b). Thus, while he rejects the idea that eye could emit rays to coalesce with external rays, Aristotle still relies on some substance or quality that connects seer and seen.

²⁰⁴ Indeed, by this point in *On Sense-Perception*, Aristotle has already made a similarly strong statement: “...if [light] really consists of fire, as Empedocles alleges and we read in the *Timaeus*, and if vision is produced by the issuing forth of light from the eye as if it were from a lantern, why does not sight function in the dark as well as by day?” (437b).

In his study of the history of theories of vision, David C. Lindberg emphasizes on this fundamental similarity between Plato and Aristotle, despite Aristotle's insistence on his departure from extramission:

...there is another issue of equal or greater importance on which Plato and Aristotle are in considerably closer agreement. For Plato, the coalescence of visual rays and daylight produces an effective optical medium between the observer and the observed -- a 'sympathetic chain,' as Cornford puts it,²⁰⁵ linking the visible object and the soul of the observer. Now Aristotle, although denying the emission and coalescence of rays, adopts Plato's emphasis on the creation of an optical medium; that it is a new state of the old medium rather than an altogether new medium does not alter the basic fact that this medium serves as the essential connecting link between the visible object and the observer. Aristotle, like Plato, solves the problem of vision by arguing that the eye and external media become parts of a homogeneous chain capable of transmitting motions (in the broadest sense) to the intellect of the observer. (9)

Thus, both extramission and intromission involve some kind of connection between seer and seen. Whether the eye emits rays to coalesce with rays in the environment, or the eye receives effluences that objects emit, or the eye receives motions propagated

²⁰⁵ Here, Lindberg cites Francis M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1937) p. 153, n. 1.

through a transparent medium, these theories all rely on an understanding of a sort of contact between the eye and the object.

Aristotle explicitly criticizes theories that simplify vision into a form of touch. He argues in *On Sense-Perception*: “Democritus and most of the physical philosophers who treat of sensation commit a most senseless blunder. They identify all sense qualities with the tactile. It is clear that if this were true each of the other senses would be a sort of touch; but it is not difficult to see that this is impossible” (442a-b). However, as his continuation makes clear, his own theory does not eliminate entirely tactile contact from other modes of perception: it simply proposes a less direct form of contact. Aristotle later states: “The number of the senses is uneven and the sense of smell, since an uneven number has a middle term, seems itself to occupy the intermediate position between the senses which require contact, viz. touch and taste, and those where the perception is mediated by something else, to wit, sight and hearing” (445a). Thus, even Aristotle’s professed rejection of contact as the foundation of all sensory perception is not absolute. His theory poses vision and hearing as based on a mediating substance, but since that substance itself is in contact with both seer and seen, it serves to connect the two through an indirect form of contact.

Aristotle’s explanation of memory in *On Memory* provides further support for the role of contact in his theory perception. Here, he focuses on the role of images in memory and the process of reconstructing an object or perception for oneself, with the awareness that the thing is in the past (450a). This explanation of memory leads him to ask how one can remember an absent object, and he proposes, “...it is clear that we

must regard the modification arising from sensation in the soul and in that bodily part where sense resides, as if it were a picture of the real thing, and memory we call the permanent existence of this modification. When a stimulus occurs it imprints as it were a mould of the sense-affection exactly as a seal-ring acts in stamping” (450a).²⁰⁶ The original sense-perception, then, acts upon the perceiver in such a way as to produce a lasting change, if, that is, the perceiver has a strong memory. Furthermore, the image of a seal creating an imprint has a strong implication of physical alteration, and such a process does not even seem to rely on any willingness on the part of the perceiver to take in the perceptual information and undergo the change. The nature of the change that occurs in the perceiver is a subject of great contention among scholars of Aristotle’s perception theories, with some arguing that “the sense organ takes on the property of its object” and others arguing that “the change brought about by the proper object of a sense is to be understood as a cognitive change—a change which can *only* be undergone by a sense or sense organ,” as Stephen Everson summarizes (58).²⁰⁷

Regardless of the precise nature of the change, the claim that perception effects a change in the perceiver clearly emphasizes the power of sensory perception and the contact, of whatever sort that might be, between perceiver and perceived. As David Lindberg summarizes during his transition from analysis of Plato and Aristotle to the

²⁰⁶ Aristotle also makes a very similar claim, again with an image of a seal imprinting wax, in *On the Soul* section 424a, lines 17-25.

²⁰⁷ In *Aristotle on Perception*, Everson discusses the issue of “change” as part of perception at great length and labels these two opposing viewpoints as the “literalist” and “spiritualist” interpretations (58). See his full chapter “Perceptual Change and Material Change” (56-102) for a detailed examination of these issues.

Stoics and Galen, the common ground among all of these theories is essentially role of a medium in between the sense organ and the object:

Now it is evident from this brief account that the Stoics, like Plato and Aristotle, focused their attention on the medium between the observer and the visible object. Thus visual perception does not occur by the actual emanation of pieces of the visible object to the eye, but by qualitative changes produced by the object in a medium suitably prepared to receive them; this, it appears to me, is the common teaching of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. (9-10)

As the connecting thread, this medium creates a form of indirect contact between perceiver and perceived, and this contact, though it may vary in intensity depending upon the theory, is the fundamental concept underlying the various theories of perception.

Conclusion: Implications of Perception

This study of ancient theories of perception certainly has its complications and weaknesses: many of the key texts are not extant, and even if we were certain of the precise nature of each theory, we cannot know how widespread the knowledge of such theories might have been. Were the tragedians aware of the Presocratic theories that were in circulation in the fifth century? Would many Athenians in the audiences of the tragedies have heard such ideas? These questions simply cannot be answered from the evidence we have, and yet I would argue that these theories of perception still have value for our examination of tragedy. As the examples of epiphany of deities and the

gesture of covering a face to prevent visual perception suggest, perception, and particularly vision, was understood to be a very powerful, even dangerous phenomenon, and the philosophers' theories about the mechanics of the visual process actually help to explain why vision might be so significant.

As we have seen, the most important concept behind many otherwise diverse theories of perception from Empedocles to Aristotle, and even later, with Epicurus, Euclid, and others, is that of some form of contact between perceiver and perceived.²⁰⁸ The precise nature of this contact varies with the theory, but many of the philosophers express this component of the process with language that vividly elicits a sense of such contact, whether they discuss "imprints" or "coalescing" of like with like, and the perceptual process in some way changes the perceiver. With such an understanding of vision, it is only natural that social and religious practices would attempt to prevent perceptual contact from occurring in certain situations. The order of the development of these ideas is irrelevant: some ideas about pollution and purification, for example, almost certainly preceded philosophical ideas about vision, but in any case, the crucial point is that all of these ideas coexisted, in various ways and among various people, during the fifth century, and they strongly complement each other.

²⁰⁸ See Edward N. Lee, "The Sense of an Object: Epicurus on Seeing and Hearing" for a study of Epicurus' theory, which is based on the idea that objects continuously put forth *eidōla*, which, when they "strike successively upon an appropriate sense organ... will generate a *phantasia* of the object" (29). An *eidōlon* is "a single fleeting film of flying atoms, a diaphanous sheet or screen or convoy of atoms, thinner than any gossamer (only one atom thick) and traveling all on its own through space at some amazingly high speed" (29). Euclid's theory is a primarily geometric one, based on rays proceeding from the eye at particular angles, and an object's visibility depends on how many rays reach it and how they do so. See Lindberg, pages 12-14 for a lucid summary of Euclid's theory.

If vision creates a link between seer and seen object, whether that link is an essentially intromissionist or extramissionist one, that link could be a means of transferring something from seer and seen. If the seen object is polluted, the perceiver might contract some degree of that pollution through that visual link, just as one might from direct physical touch. This idea explains not only why seeing might cause the spread of pollution, but also why covering a polluted person might have value as an attempt to prevent such pollution. If mere proximity were sufficient for contagion, why would covering and uncovering be such a significant gesture, as in Euripides' *Heracles*, for example? Proximity may still entail some risk, and Apollo and Artemis are concerned specifically about their presence near death in *Alcestis* and *Hippolytus*, but visual perception must be one step closer in contact and danger, as compared to proximity, and probably a step further from these as compared to direct physical touch. Thus, perception and pollution become intimately linked, and the necessity of proper separation of things that do not belong together is the natural result.

Whether the object of sight is a god or a polluted matricide, vision is a particularly powerful mode of connection between perceiver and perceived. Characters within tragedies are certainly aware of this power, and they attempt to avoid dangerous sights or to prevent others from seeing dangerous sights. These instances of perception are internal to a tragedy, occurring between characters in the world imagined on the stage, but of course, the theater is a seeing-place, and the spectators are watching everything on that stage. What, then, is the nature of *their* perception? Could unstageable, unseen props and action sometimes serve to prevent spectators from seeing things that may not be right to see? These are the central

questions that this study ultimately proposes, and since Greek tragedy is so concerned with seeing, not seeing, unseeing, and imagining, I would like to turn, in conclusion, to the implications of theatrical spectatorship.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: SEEING IN THE “SEEING PLACE”

At its basic, literal meaning, the Greek *theatron* is a place for seeing. As my discussions of unseen props, unseen action, and imaginatively unseen epiphanies has shown, though, seeing itself is not a simple concept in the context of the Greek tragic theater. Seeing may sometimes be primarily a physiological process, as visual information from the world enters the mind and is interpreted, but at times it may be a different kind of cognitive process, as the mind constructs a visualization of a scene by applying an imaginative force to a variety of sensory data, not exclusively visual. Through this latter process, a spectator might “fill in the gaps” of the sensory data to imagine an earthquake as it unfolds, or, conversely, a spectator might create gaps in the data to imagine the true invisibility and ineffability of a god for which an actor’s body and voice simply mark the place. These examples show that the Greek tragic theater is a theater of imaginative seeing, not only for those events that occur off stage and in the past tense, as do many of the violent events related in messenger speeches, but also for the very events, objects, and characters that are occurring in the stage space, in the play’s present tense.

Indeed, this way of thinking about the distinctive spectatorial experience of Greek tragedy may be one step towards understanding Aristotle’s complex, sometimes contradictory attitude toward “*opsis*” [ὄψις] in his *Poetics*. Although translators often render this term as “spectacle,” a word that carries heavy connotative baggage from contemporary usage, the basic definition of *opsis* is simply “appearance” or “thing

seen.”²⁰⁹ Aristotle’s famous rejection of spectacle as necessary for tragedy’s effect is thus about the visual, “seen” aspects of tragedy and so would seem to be a justification for studying and experiencing tragedy merely as written texts on the page, without attention to a superfluous performance element. My arguments for the power of the text in creating certain objects and actions might seem at times to take up this approach: after all, I have insisted on simplicity when considering stage machinery and special effects. However, as I hope my attention to the actors’ voices and gestures and to the spectators’ own imaginative contributions has indicated, the text of Greek tragedy is not sufficient for understanding the art form. At least, the “text” is not sufficient as long as we insist on a modern understanding of a written text and private, silent reading as the way of approaching a “text.”

Aristotle: Tragedy, Poetry, and *Opsis*

Aristotle’s first strong disavowal of *opsis* for tragedy comes in Chapter VI of *Poetics*:

...ή δὲ ὄψις ψυχαγωγικὸν μὲν, ἀτεχνότατον δὲ καὶ ἥκιστα οἰκεῖον τῆς ποιητικῆς· ἡ γὰρ τῆς τραγωδίας δύναμις καὶ ἄνευ ἁγῶνος καὶ ὑποκριτῶν ἔστιν, ἔτι δὲ κυριώτερα περὶ τὴν ἀπεργασίαν τῶν ὄψεων ἢ τοῦ σκευοποιοῦ τέχνη τῆς τῶν ποιητῶν ἐστίν. (1450b.16-20)

[...but *opsis* is on the one hand very moving but on the other, both outside of the craft and the least proper/integral element of the poet; for

²⁰⁹ Liddell and Scott, first definition. Further definitions include “the power of sight” or “vision,” as well as specific parts or functions of the eye.

the power of tragedy exists without reference to both
performance/competition and actors, and still more, the authority over
the workmanship of *opsis* is more the craft of the mask-maker
[σκευοποιού]²¹⁰ than that of the poet [ποιητῶν].]²¹¹

Interestingly, Aristotle's supposed rejection of *opsis* is here more properly a division of labor or discipline. He readily acknowledges that *opsis* is “ψυχαγωγικόν”: moving, persuasive, or emotionally powerful. Literally, it is a contest (ἄγών) with the soul (ψυχή). Certainly, then, Aristotle is not dismissing *opsis* as weak or irrelevant but rather putting it to one side as not central to a particular craft. A complication with his argument emerges here, though, as Aristotle speaks of the realm of the *poet* [ποιητικῆς], not of tragedy as a whole, and indeed, his closing claim is that the crafts related to *opsis* are more the province of the “σκευοποιός” (*skeupoios*) [mask-maker] than of the poet.

Perhaps Aristotle's fluctuation between terms for poetry and terms for tragedy is simply a relic of the composition and purpose of the *Poetics*, as notes for oral lecture rather than as a fully developed written treatise, but his emphasis on the division of responsibilities could be a key to understanding why and in what respect *opsis* might be unnecessary. Aristotle's overarching project in his *Poetics* is to defend

²¹⁰ The σκευοποιός was in charge of making or gathering the masks, costumes, and properties for the performance. This word appears in only a few texts, so our understanding of his domain is incomplete. Aristophanes' *Knights* does include an enlightening reference, as Demosthenes assures the Sausage Seller and the audience that although Cleon is about to appear, he will not wear a mask with the real Cleon's features, for “οὐδεὶς...τῶν σκευοποιῶν” [no one among the mask-makers] has dared to do such a thing (231-232).

²¹¹ All translations from the *Poetics* are my own, but the other quotations from Greek and Latin texts in this chapter are translated by others, as noted.

mimetic poetry, particularly in response to the complaints about it from Plato and his followers, and one of his primary methods for doing so is to compare it to epic poetry, a genre that enjoyed, and often still enjoys, much more universal respect and acceptance than the theater.²¹² He thus needs to be able to compare tragedy and epic through elements that they share, ideally showing that tragedy can do everything that they share just as well as epic can and that anything extra that tragedy adds does not detract from it, at least not to such an extent that it degrades tragedy below the level of epic. Since one of the shared elements between epic and tragedy is the poet and his art, Aristotle needs to be able to distinguish the poet's contribution from the other aspects of tragedy, and this is exactly his project at the end of Chapter VI. *Opsis* is not unimportant, but, Aristotle argues, it is a primary concern not of the poet but of the *skeuopoios*.

What, then, comprises *opsis* as Aristotle uses it in this passage? It must encompass, in the first place, those crafts that the *skeuopoios* contributes to a production, such as the masks and costumes. From the preceding clause, we find two additional components of tragedy that, while not specifically identified as *opsis*, are deemed inessential to the power of tragedy: competition [ἄγών] and actors [ὑποκριταί]. Many translators render ἄγῶνος as “performance,” as Stephen Halliwell does in his Loeb edition, but ἄγών (*agon*) is the word for the competitions of tragedies and choruses at the festivals, as well as for assemblies and speeches (“contests” of rhetoric) before assemblies, and this important valence disappears when the term is

²¹² For his specific comparisons between tragedy and epic, see especially Chapters XXIV-XXVI. Chapter XXVI is particularly significant, as it provides his final conclusions about the two (1461b-1462b).

translated as “performance.” It is possible that Aristotle is not arguing that tragedy’s power exists without any performance element at all, but that it exists without the formal, state-sponsored production in a festival context. Furthermore, in other parts of the *Poetics*, Aristotle clearly acknowledges the importance of the actors’ enactment for tragic mimesis and of the actors’ gestures in convincingly presenting emotions,²¹³ so it would seem that voice and gesture remain important to the presentation of the text to its audience. Do these, then, not belong to the category of *opsis*?

I would like to suggest that a key consideration for understanding Aristotle’s discussion of *opsis* and of tragedy more generally is his distinction between seeing and hearing. In Chapter XIV, another of his famed dismissals of *opsis*, Aristotle argues that a tragic plot should be able to produce the effects essential to tragedy even in someone who hears it without seeing it:

Ἔστιν μὲν οὖν τὸ φοβερὸν καὶ ἐλεεινὸν ἐκ τῆς ὄψεως γίνεσθαι, ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς συστάσεως τῶν πραγμάτων, ὅπερ ἐστὶ πρότερον καὶ ποιητοῦ ἀμείνονος. δεῖ γὰρ καὶ ἄνευ τοῦ ὁρᾶν οὕτω συνεστάναι τὸν μῦθον ὥστε τὸν ἀκούοντα τὰ πράγματα γινόμενα καὶ φρίττειν καὶ ἐλεεῖν ἐκ τῶν συμβαινόντων... (1453b.1-6)

[So the fearful and pitiable is able to come about from *opsis*, but it is also from the very structure of actions, which is the higher priority [literally, “the first”] and of the better poet. For it is necessary that the story/plot be structured thus so that one hearing/reading the actions

²¹³ See, for example, 1449b.30-33 (Chapter VI) and 1455a.29-32 (Chapter XVII).

happening without seeing [ὁρᾶν] them should tremble and pity at what results.]

For Aristotle, the audience's experience of fear and pity is the hallmark of tragedy, and he argues here that a good tragedy should be able to produce these effects even in one who hears it without seeing it. As long as we understand him to mean the hearing of the play itself and not just a summary of the story, as is most probable, the passage essentially argues that a good tragedy should be effective in recitation, the very form in which most people experience epic poetry. Here again, then, Aristotle is setting aside the elements specific to fully produced theatrical performance in order to show that tragedy can compete with epic in its own arena. Moreover, the elements that remain are not simply the written text but also the voice of at least one performer. He may dismiss the importance of actors [ὑποκριταί], in the formal and plural senses, without completely eliminating the need for a speaker. Perhaps even in Aristotle's belittling of *opsis*, the old truism of the theater remains: the only essential components for theater are performer and audience.

Even those scholars who would seek to use Aristotle as the authority for approaching tragedy should not, therefore, use his treatment of *opsis* as license to regard tragedies simply as written texts. In the ancient world, reading silently in private was not the primary mode of experiencing either tragedy or epic, and even as Aristotle concludes his comparison of the two by claiming that reading vividly renders the qualities of tragedy [διὰ γὰρ τοῦ ἀναγινώσκειν φανερὰ ὅποια τίς ἐστίν], he

probably understands “reading” to be reading aloud (1462a.12).²¹⁴ In order to show tragedy’s value in relation to epic, Aristotle makes the two as parallel as possible, insisting that a recitation of a good tragedy should produce the desired effects even without the apparatus that accompanies a full, official performance, and in fact, such a recitation by a good performer may still be able to create many, though probably not all, of the vivid, imaginatively constructed sights that I have argued tragedies create from the unstageable. Aristotle’s understanding of the most essential elements of tragedy seems to include those elements most necessary for stimulating spectators’ imaginations to experience a vivid, present-tense, theatrically real action that remains literally unseen. Aristotle’s *opsis*, then, might comprise the elements of apparatus that belong specifically to the *theatron*. By his argument, tragedy can exist outside of the theater, the “seeing-place,” but even in recitation or reading aloud, performance and the visual remain key to its effects: the degree of imagination that the audience contributes to the visualization may simply vary with the degree of visible apparatus provided in the performance.

Aristotle’s *Poetics* has been the object of so much critical fascination that it is a very difficult text to approach afresh. The traditional interpretations of it are heavily inscribed, and it is all too easy to allow preconceptions to inflect any attempt at a new reading. The problem is particularly acute for those who are limited to reading it in English translation: Aristotle uses many terms with a range of definitions and

²¹⁴ The first definition of ἀναγινώσκω is to “know well” or to “know again,” from the root γινώσκω, “to know,” but it came to mean “to read,” “to read aloud,” and eventually even “to attend lectures” on a subject (Liddell and Scott). While the word does not definitively indicate reading aloud, it certainly does not indicate silent reading, either.

valences, and any choice a translator makes must limit the meaning of that word, as well as pick up connotations from its usage in English. The translation of *mimesis* as “imitation” may be the most notorious instance of this issue, but as we have seen, the translation of *opsis* as “spectacle” or of *agon* as “performance” can be equally problematic.²¹⁵ Nevertheless, if we, as scholars of classics or of theater, are to continue to use the *Poetics* as a foundational text in our research and teaching, I think a reappraisal of Aristotle’s approach to performance is necessary. What would it mean for some of our assumptions about Aristotle, Greek tragedy, and early aesthetic theory if we were to accept that he values highly the performance of a reader or actor, if not the addition of material apparatus? If Aristotle is the defender of theater, in opposition to Platonists, should we not expect him to support at least some of its distinctively theatrical elements?

I have argued that Aristotle does not, in fact, argue that silent reading of a written text can provide the full effect of a tragedy. This claim would allow us to include a performer’s voice, and possibly gestures, as essential elements for tragedy, in Aristotle’s estimation, which, further, supports an understanding of tragedy as capable of producing visual elements through aural means. An audience can use what it hears, be that language or vocal inflection, in order to see something with the

²¹⁵ This issue poses a particular challenge when teaching the text to undergraduates without knowledge of Greek, in a theater history course or introduction to Greek theater, for example. In my own experience of teaching a freshman-level course in Greek theater, I found it helpful to provide students with glosses on several key terms, offering them alternative definitions and connotations. We also spent time in class wrestling with the possible implications of choosing one of these definitions, and I think the students developed a better understanding of the complexities of translation, in addition to a more critical approach to the *Poetics*.

imagination. Nevertheless, Aristotle's attitude toward *opsis* does remain somewhat problematic, and I would yet maintain that his dismissal of it is too strong. Most importantly, the plurality of voices and bodies, especially for the chorus, is essential for the effect of many tragic scenes, and while Aristotle's understanding of "reading" may involve recitation or reading aloud, it does not seem to involve multiple speakers. How could a single speaker convey the mass panic of the Chorus in *Seven against Thebes*, as they see and hear the approach of the enemy army? How could one voice create the polyphony of suggestions as the Chorus debates possible actions during the suspenseful moments in which Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon and Cassandra off stage in *Agamemnon*? While I do hope to disrupt overly simplistic interpretations of his use of the word *opsis* and of his evaluation of the significance of various elements for tragedy, I would also insist that his reduction of multiple performers to a single reader is a misguided attempt to make tragedy as parallel to epic poetry as possible, in his efforts to validate it by comparison to epic, and through this simplification, Aristotle loses one of the most distinctive and essential qualities of tragedy.

Despite this important reservation, I would like to continue examining how this new understanding of *opsis* and Aristotle's use of it might relate to other ancient approaches to tragedy and complement my emphasis on tragedy's ability to make the unseen seen. In fact, Aristotle's emphasis on an actor's voice over the material apparatus also connects him to a later treatise that speaks particularly strongly in favor of the power of imaginative visualization for the effectiveness of poetry and rhetoric:

Longinus' *On the Sublime*.²¹⁶ Longinus begins his investigation into sublimity by noting the power that comes from “transporting” the audience, rather than appealing to reason:

For the effect of genius is not to persuade the audience but rather to transport them out of themselves. Invariably what inspires wonder, with its power of amazing us, always prevails over what is merely convincing and pleasing. For our persuasions are usually under our own control, while these things exercise an irresistible power and mastery, and get the better of every listener. (1.4)²¹⁷

To a great extent, Longinus' criteria for the sublime are about the effect on the listener or reader, a sense of “transport” or “wonder” that overcomes the listener's rational judgment. Much of the treatise that follows this introduction of the sublime explores how poetry or rhetoric might achieve sublimity: what kinds of tools tend to be successful for creating such effects?

Since the sublime should create a feeling or experience that overwhelms critical judgment, the tools of sublimity cannot be simply reason, evidence, and compelling argumentation. The sublime, he argues, produces its effect, at least in part, by leading the listeners to visualize scenes:

Weight, grandeur, and urgency in writing are very largely produced, dear young friend, by the use of ‘visualizations’ (*phantasiai*). That at

²¹⁶ The authorship of this text is unknown and very controversial, but I will refer to the author as “Longinus,” in keeping with tradition and for the sake of convenience. Its date is likewise unknown, but it is certainly well after Aristotle, probably sometime between the first and third centuries AD.

²¹⁷ Translations from *On the Sublime* are by W. H. Fyfe in the Loeb edition.

least is what I call them; others call them ‘image productions.’ For the term *phantasia* is applied in general to an idea which enters the mind from any source and engenders speech, but the word has now come to be used predominantly of passages where, inspired by strong emotion, you seem to see what you describe and bring it vividly before the eyes of your audience. That *phantasia* means one thing in oratory and another in poetry you will yourself detect, and also that the object of the poetical form of it is to enthrall, and that of the prose form to present things vividly, though both indeed aim at the emotional and the excited. (15.1-2)

The sublime does not engage in an argument with listeners, but rather overcomes their rational judgment:

There, besides developing his factual argument the orator has visualized the event and consequently his conception far exceeds the limits of mere persuasion. In all such cases the stronger element seems naturally to catch our ears, so that our attention is drawn from the reasoning to the enthralling effect of the imagination, and the reality is concealed in a halo of brilliance. (15.11)

The visualizations are somehow so powerful that they disengage the rational part of the mind, and they may ultimately lead the audience to a conclusion that remains unjustified by the facts of the situation or by logical argument.

Longinus’ *phantasiai* might be very similar to the imaginative visualizations that I have suggested for the spectators of Greek tragedy: in each case, the listener or

spectator sees something through the imagination that is not fully, visibly present in reality. In oratory, the ultimate goal is to persuade the audience to come to a particular conclusion, though the method is not so much to persuade as to create an emotional, highly energized experience that leads to the desired conclusion. The rhetoric itself does most of the work of creating the image and impressing it upon the listeners.

This situation is more complex and more cooperative in the context of staged tragedy, however. For Longinus, writing well after the “Golden Age” of Greek tragedy and even, for that matter, after the height of Greek New Comedy, literary drama may be recited in private or studied in schools rather than performed on a stage with actors and a public audience. He sometimes uses passages from Euripides as examples of the sublime in poetry, but his treatments of those excerpts do not seem to imply that he is thinking of fully staged performances. His distinction between poetry and oratory, then, is not so much about the type of performance, since in each case it may be a recitation by a single speaker, as about the purpose. Oratory seeks to persuade, though when sublime it does so without “persuading” in a rational, argumentative sense, while poetry seeks to “enthrall,” to give the listener some kind of powerful aesthetic experience.

In either case, the sight literally before the eyes of the audience is essentially the same: a performer, probably not in a costume or mask, speaking the words and using the voice, gestures, and possibly movement to bring the language to life. In either case, Longinus seems to give all, or at least almost all, of the power to create the visualizations and their ensuing effects to the poet and speaker. If we return to the context of staged Greek theater in the fifth century, however, there is much more

available for the audience to see, even if some actions and objects remain unseen. The process of creating the “visualizations” becomes more complex, as the spectators must use the visual data in combination with other sensory data, including the text, in order to see (or unsee) the appropriate images in the imagination. Longinus’ “top-down” understanding of how the sublime produces its effects may be problematic even for oratory, through its dismissal of the listeners’ agency and participation, but it certainly does not work as a full explanation for the imaginative vision that spectators may experience in a theater.

Both Aristotle and Longinus provide some corroboration for the idea that Greek tragedy, and perhaps other forms of speech or performance, asked its audiences to imagine some sights that were not literally visible. Although each writer is more concerned with the poetry itself than with the theatrical performance of it, their discussions of the visual element remain useful for developing an understanding of the ancients’ expectations of tragedy. Neither tragic poetry nor the material apparatus of the theater need supply every detail that the audience must understand to be present and visible: rather, the audience itself will find ways to see the unseen.

Perception and the Ethics of Spectatorship: A Case Study in Plato

Longinus’ argument that the sublime should create its effect without, or even in spite of, the listener’s rational faculties is a vivid illustration of Plato’s great fear about mimetic poetry. Plato’s exclusion of theater from his ideal republic has been the root of much anti-theatricality in the Western tradition, and even today, shadows of his attitude return in arguments about censorship, violence in the media, and film and

video game rating systems. In each case, the central question is that of media's (or performance's) capacity to influence the audience, particularly on a subconscious level. For Plato, it is exactly this overwhelming of the listener/spectator's rationality, which Longinus considers sublime, that is so dangerous.

As I explained in more detail in Chapter 4, Plato makes an important distinction between two parts of the soul (ψυχή, *psychê*) in Book X of the *Republic*: one part approaches things rationally, while the other part tends to be persuaded by appearances and can be much more easily deceived (603A). This latter part is also that which tends to express strong emotions, rather than behaving in a more contained and reasoned way. Ultimately, Plato concludes that the mimetic poet appeals to the “inferior” part of the soul, that which does not judge by reason and measurement, and the poet focuses on this part when presenting characters: “And is it not obvious that the nature of the mimetic poet is not related to this better part of the soul and his cunning is not framed to please it, if he is to win favour with the multitude, but is devoted to the fretful and complicated type of character because it is easy to imitate?” (605A). Mimetic performance, according to Plato, “stimulates and fosters this [irrational] element in the soul, and by strengthening it tends to destroy the rational part” (605B).²¹⁸

How exactly might mimetic performance appeal to this part of the soul and override the rational part? Plato's reasoning, I propose, is based on some of his presuppositions about sensory perception and its function in mimetic performance and spectatorship. The various theories among ancient philosophers about the exact nature

²¹⁸ Translations from Plato's *Republic* are by Paul Shorey.

and processes of sensory perception help to explain why perception, particularly the visual, would be such a significant concern for the Greeks generally. If vision involves some kind of contact between perceiver and perceived, and if the contact has the potential to affect the perceiver, a natural consequence is a concern that one should not perceive anything that could be harmful, be it a polluting corpse or an all-powerful god. The need for proper separation of incompatible things, such as the dead and the living, becomes a need for perceptual separation, not simply physical separation. This link between theories of vision and concerns about spectatorship of mimetic representation, then, emerges in Plato's arguments about the nature and the dangers of mimetic performance.

Plato serves as a useful case study for connecting theories of perception and theories of spectatorship, since his extant work includes both the treatises on perception discussed in Chapter 4, such as passages of the *Timaeus*, and writings on mimetic poetry, such as the *Ion* and sections of *The Republic*. Scholarship on Plato tends to be sharply divided into topics, with critics studying his political philosophy, metaphysics, or aesthetic theory, for example, without crossing the disciplinary boundaries among them. However, placing his writings on perception in dialogue with his writings on mimetic poetry sheds new light on his notoriously skeptical, even anti-theatrical views.

If, as he argues in the *Republic*, mimetic poetry appeals to the "inferior" part of the soul, the part most susceptible to being deceived by appearances, it makes sense that this appeal would be through sensory perception, just as Longinus sees the effects of the sublime emerging from the *phantasia* it creates. Such an appeal could then lead

to dangerous false judgments, possibly with very little cognitive, rational judgment of the sensory information. The *Ion* dialogue, in which Socrates debates with a rhapsode (a performer of epic poetry) about the nature of his art, includes a particularly vivid description of how performance might work to short-circuit more careful reasoning, and this dialogue also introduces a possible distinction between seeing and hearing in their effects on spectators.

In the beginning of the dialogue, Plato (or Socrates as created by Plato) uses the word “τοῖς ἀκούουσι” to refer to the audience of a rhapsode. The word simply means “those who hear” and provides a relatively neutral, accurate reference to the audience, as Socrates explains that “...the rhapsode ought to make himself an interpreter of the poet’s thought to his audience” (530C).²¹⁹ Since this term emphasizes the listening aspect of reception, which seems appropriate for describing the reception of a recitation of epic poetry, it is significant that Plato exchanges this for a visual term when he moves to a more detailed discussion of the audience’s experience of a performance.

Later in the dialogue, Plato’s Socrates asks Ion, the rhapsode, “...when you give a good recitation and specially thrill your audience...are you then in your senses, or are you carried out of yourself, and does your soul in an ecstasy suppose herself to be among the scenes you are describing, whether they be in Ithaca, or in Troy, or as the poems may chance to place them?” (535B). In this case, the word that W. R. M. Lamb translates as “audience” is actually “τοὺς θεωμένους,” meaning “those who watch.” Similarly, when Plato’s Socrates explains his analogy of a magnet drawing

²¹⁹ Translation is by W. R. M. Lamb.

iron rings to itself, he again uses a word of watching to refer to the audience: “And are you aware that your spectator [ὁ θεατής] is the last of the rings which I spoke of as receiving from each other the power transmitted from the Heracleian lodestone?” (535E).

Why should Plato use one term in the beginning of the dialogue and a different term later? As his arguments in the *Republic* show, he is concerned that poetry, through its appeal to the “inferior” part of the soul, has the power to sweep up even those who normally control their feelings tightly. The specific uses of terms of seeing and hearing in the *Ion* suggest that he considers that the visual element contributes most strongly to this danger of emotional absorption and loss of control. When describing the rhapsode’s interpretation of a poet’s thought to the audience, a process that implies some critical thought and reason, Plato uses the term for hearers. When he describes the rhapsode’s ecstasy or feeling of being transported and the transmission of that feeling to the audience, however, he uses the word for watcher.

It seems that the visual aspect of the performance is more important than the aural for creating these moments of ecstasy, and these are the moments in which the spectators become that final ring in the series that is drawn to the magnet. The analogy of the magnet and iron rings itself essentially dehumanizes the spectators, representing them as an object or abstraction, and this image further emphasizes their loss of agency. As watchers of a performance, Plato’s spectators become a powerless object caught up in the absorbing forces of some divine power source, with their powers of reason totally overcome by their emotional response. Plato’s choice of terminology thus emphasizes his implicit assumption that visual, bodily representation is more

dangerous, that is, more likely than speech alone to cause the absorption, ecstasy, and emotional transport that negate any individual agency.

The significant difference between audience and spectator, or seeing and hearing, that emerges in the *Ion* is actually similar to the difference between the mechanics of seeing and hearing as detailed in the *Timaeus*. The visual process involves rays that extend outward from the eye, fuse with rays extending from objects in the world, and transmit information back through the eye to the soul. The aural process is much simpler and lacks the senses of contact and fusion that distinguish the visual process: sensory data enter the ear as if through a funnel, eventually proceeding to the liver and transmitting information to the soul.²²⁰ The nature of the contact between perceiver and perceived is of primary importance here. Sounds do enter the ear and ultimately reach the soul, but Plato's model leaves ample room for the soul, or mind, to interpret that data with some independence and distance from the perceived object. In the case of vision, however, the visual rays serve as a medium between the eye and the object, resulting in close contact between the two, almost a physical touch. Moreover, the idea of a "fusion" between these different emissions implies some loss of control or condensation of the perceiver and perceived. Perhaps the perceiver has some agency in deciding how to direct the eye's rays, but once the rays meet with like rays in the world, the process seems to override the perceiver's control, with the information taking a quick path to the soul. Vision, it would seem, is capable of producing false judgments partly because it leaves too little room for rational analysis,

²²⁰ For a more detailed explanation of Plato's theories, see Chapter 4, pages 251-257.

instead encouraging the perceiver to accept whatever conclusions the appearances may suggest.

Plato's primary concern about mimetic performance is that it stimulates the "inferior" or irrational part of the soul at the expense of the "superior" or rational part, thus encouraging unacceptable behavior and false judgments in the spectator. His understanding of vision then explains that mimetic performance, whether staged theater or recited poetry, creates this danger through the sensory processes it engages. Whether we limit our scope to literal, physiological vision or enlarge it to include imaginative vision, which seems appropriate given his use of epic as the subject of the *Ion*, that visual element threatens to overcome reason and caution on the part of the perceiver. As in Longinus' discussion of *phantasiai*, the visual somehow breaks through the perceiver's defenses with a sort of physical force, leaving an impression on the soul.

Broadening the Scope: Perception and Performance in Theater History

In Late Antiquity, the nature and effects of sensory perception remained an important concern, particularly as Christian thinkers, including Tertullian and Augustine, warned Christians against attending the Roman spectacles. Tertullian, for example, feared that the spectacles would corrupt their spectators as a result of both their pagan origins and their immoral subject matter. In his short treatise *On the Spectacles*, he vividly describes the atmosphere of a race at the circus with an interest in the spectators' sensory experience that Plato himself might have shown:

Look at the populace coming to the show—mad already! disorderly, blind, excited already about its bets! The praetor is too slow for them; all the time their eyes are on his urn, in it, as if rolling with the lots he shakes up in it. The signal is to be given. They are all in suspense, anxious suspense. One frenzy, one voice! (Recognize their frenzy from their empty-mindedness.) ‘He has thrown it!’ the cry; everyone tells everybody else what every one of them saw, all of them on the instant. (99)²²¹

In the final moments before the race begins, excitement runs high, due in part to the bets, and spectators close their minds and senses to anything except that race. Their intense focus, notably a visual focus on the urn and signal, creates a volatile situation, as a huge crowd erupts in “one voice.” Even after the race, the spectators’ minds are consumed by the visual, as “everyone tells everybody else what every one of them saw.” The spectacle itself controls their attention throughout the show, similar to the effect of Longinus’ *phantasiai* or Plato’s Heracleian lodestone, but the spectacle and the authorities directing it may not be able to control where their energies and emotions may go once aroused. Hence, the spectacle presents the danger not only of false judgment, but also of riots, which was a very real concern for spectacles during the Roman Empire.²²²

²²¹ Translation is by T. R. Glover.

²²² Tacitus recounts several events that attest to the tendency for theaters and circuses to be sites of rioting and chaos, whether the riot begins with a spectacle or begins elsewhere, with the mob moving to the space for further demonstration. For example, in his *Histories* 1.72 (written ca. 110 AD), he relates an event of 69, in which “All Rome gathered to the Palace and the squares and, overflowing into the Circus and

For early Christians like Tertullian, objections to the spectacles are many and varied, but as Tertullian's description of a race suggests, the nature of perception is an important element. Perhaps the strongest warnings against the power of sensory perception at the spectacles come in Augustine's *Confessions* (ca. 397 AD), with the story of Alypius' transition from unwilling hearer to voracious seer. Alypius, as Augustine relates, was strongly opposed to the spectacles until one day when a group of his friends chanced upon him and forced him to accompany them to a gladiatorial show. In protest, he closed his eyes and refused to watch the bloody sport, but he could not close his ears. Eventually, a cry from the audience led him to open his eyes in curiosity, and as soon as he saw the action, he was overcome by a desire to see more and more of the fighting:

...[he] opened his eyes, and was struck with a deeper wound in his soul than the other,²²³ whom he desired to see, was in his body; and he fell more miserably than he on whose fall the mighty clamour was raised, which entered through his ears and unlocked his eyes, to make way for the striking and beating down of his soul... For, directly he saw that blood, he therewith imbibed a sort of savageness; nor did he turn away, but fixed his eye, drinking in madness unconsciously, and was delighted with the guilty contest and drunken with the bloody pastime. (VI, Chapter VIII, section 13)²²⁴

theaters, where the mob can demonstrate with greater impunity, raised a seditious clamor" (Csapo and Slater 324).

²²³ I.e., the gladiator whose fall caused the audience to cry out.

²²⁴ Translation is by J. G. Pilkington.

In this case, the ears might seem to be the more vulnerable portal between the perceiver and the outside world. Because Alypius is unable to close his ears, the crowd's outburst penetrates his best defenses against the spectacle. On the other hand, it is the instant of *seeing* the gladiatorial fight that functions as the point of no return. The visual sight leads to "the striking and beating down of his soul," and his ensuing obsession with the spectacle manifests itself through vision, as he "fixe[s] his eye, drinking in madness unconsciously." Again, Augustine explains the danger of the spectacles as a visual one. The effect is a total permeation of the soul with the desire for more of these visual perceptions.

The role of sensory perception, and particularly vision, is thus an important element in the anti-theatrical treatises of Late Antiquity, as Christian leaders encouraged their followers to devote their souls to God. In this understanding, sense perception can affect the soul, which then means that Christians must be careful about what they allow themselves to perceive. Eugene Vance explains that for Augustine, sense perception itself is not wrong or corrupt, but "the seer's soul will be potentially degraded or reformed according to the *kind* of image that the soul wills and summons to mind during its cognitive activity," which means that "the primordial fall of the soul begins not in the bodily senses, but within the soul itself when it first directs its attention away from its search to know spiritual or intelligible things, and chooses instead to entertain and indulge in the images of material things" (24). Plato's understanding that visual perception needs to be controlled by an orderly, rational, restraining part of the soul thus recurs in arguments several hundred years later: once

perception awakens the “inferior” part of the soul, it is too late to stop its effects, so the rational part must ensure that it only allows harmless, preferably holy, perceptions.

Although the present study cannot venture further into examinations of later historical moments, it should be clear at this point that Greek theories of perception had a lasting impact on philosophical approaches to spectatorship, even when that influence remains implicit. The theories of unstaged but imaginatively seen objects and action presented here have, likewise, strong potential for application to other theatrical forms and moments, as, for example, in great battle scenes or the tempests²²⁵ of Shakespeare or in the extreme, often supernatural events of nineteenth-century closet drama. Modern-day solo performance often makes use of some of the same techniques as Greek tragedy for such purposes, with a performer using perceptual language and present-tense descriptions to recreate scenes, objects, and characters for the audience, sometimes with no visual representations of them at all. The phenomenon of staged but imaginatively unseen gods may combine with the unstaged and imaginatively seen in the context of medieval drama, for which the performance space was a platea, a neutral space, such as a town square or a pageant wagon, that could then become the farthest reaches of heaven and hell. Just as the Greeks faced complications when using human actors to represent gods, so too has Christian theater taken pains to represent the divine while avoiding any implication that the human actor is, in any way, God.²²⁶

²²⁵ *King Lear*, as well as *The Tempest*, would be a fascinating subject of such inquiry.

²²⁶ In fact, England passed Blasphemy Laws in 1606 that prohibited the performance of most religious drama, for just such fears. As Sarah Beckwith explains in *Signifying God*, “Corpus Christi theater became idolatrous when it was regarded as confining the

The theater is indeed a place for seeing. Even when some elements of a story remain physically unstaged, theatrical performance engages the visual sense of its spectators, as they imaginatively create mental images of the objects or actions that the performance demands. Clearly, much work remains to be done, and a wide variety of moments in theater history are ripe for this inquiry. Perhaps investigation even into our own current understandings of sensory perception, both the technical research of advanced fields such as neuroscience and the assumptions or perspectives of non-experts, could help us to approach our preconceptions about theatrical performance and filmed or digital media. Just as Plato's theories of vision remained implicit in his arguments about mimetic poetry, so too might our own theories and attitudes toward performance contain undercurrents of our perceptual theories and assumptions.

limitless and potent God to the body of an actor, to his mortal gestures and banalizing mimicry, and when the actor's act was understood to be scandalously imitating rather than gestically signifying God" (3).

APPENDIX I

CATALOGUE OF PROPS IN GREEK TRAGEDY

This catalogue lists all the props with specific references in extant tragedies. For ease of use, the plays are ordered by playwright (Aeschylus, Sophocles, then Euripides), and within each playwright's corpus, the plays follow the order used in the Loeb Classical Library volumes. The Reference column lists the line(s) that indicate the item, based on the Loeb editions. For props that recur frequently, this list typically includes the first reference, any later references that are particularly significant, and "*et alia*" to indicate that there are further examples.

For the sake of being comprehensive, this catalogue also includes set pieces with which characters interact and costume pieces with specific references, such as particularly elaborate clothing or mourning clothing. These costume pieces sometimes qualify as props, if characters interact with them (e.g. by tearing their robes or taking off a garland), but sometimes they seem to remain just costume pieces. Further, this catalogue includes props with textual references even if they may not actually be present or visible on the stage. See the comments column for notes about these two qualifications for the relevant items; the latter case is the subject of Chapter 2.

Playwright	Play	Prop	Reference	Comments
Aeschylus	<i>Persians</i>	Chairs for the Chorus	140-141	This prop is possible but not necessary.
Aeschylus	<i>Persians</i>	Libations and offerings (a variety)	523-524; 607ff.	The Queen brings, then offers them.

Aeschylus	<i>Persians</i>	Carriage for Queen	607	The Queen says she comes without her carriage this time, implying that she arrived in it previously.
Aeschylus	<i>Persians</i>	Tomb or mound	647, 659, et al.	A set piece, but actors present offerings and pray on it, and the Ghost of Darius rises from it.
Aeschylus	<i>Persians</i>	Ragged costume for Xerxes	834-836, 1017	This is a costume, but Xerxes specifically indicates it.
Aeschylus	<i>Persians</i>	Tented wagon	1000-1001	Chorus refers to Xerxes' "tented wagon," but the comment may indicate that he has returned without it.
Aeschylus	<i>Persians</i>	(Empty) quiver for Xerxes	1020, 1022	Xerxes indicates his quiver, with "τόνδε."
Aeschylus	<i>Persians</i>	Robes, white hair for Chorus	1046 ff.	Xerxes leads the Chorus in grieving for the army's destruction, and the elders tear their robes and white hair.
Aeschylus	<i>Seven against Thebes</i>	Armor for the soldiers	31	Eteocles orders men to go to their stations in full armor. They may or may not be wearing it or putting it on.
Aeschylus	<i>Seven against Thebes</i>	Altar, with images of gods	96-98, 185	The Chorus may supplicate and clasp the images.

Aeschylus	<i>Seven against Thebes</i>	Greaves, armor for Eteocles	675 ff.	Eteocles calls for his greaves. If they do appear, he puts them on.
Aeschylus	<i>Seven against Thebes</i>	Corpses: Eteocles and Polynices	848 ff.	The Chorus says that the messenger's words of the disaster are now clear to see.
Aeschylus	<i>Suppliants</i>	Olive branches for Chorus	21-22, 191-192, 333-334, 480 ff.	The women say they are carrying these, and Danaus later takes them offstage, to leave on other altars.
Aeschylus	<i>Suppliants</i>	"Sidonian" veils for Chorus	120-121, et al.	The women say they are tearing their veils, though it may just be an expression, not enacted.
Aeschylus	<i>Suppliants</i>	Rock, an altar to the Gods of the Assembly	188-190	Danaus tells the Chorus to sit on the sacred rock as suppliants.
Aeschylus	<i>Suppliants</i>	Trident on the altar	218	Danaus says he sees a trident. The altar may have emblems of the gods, but most likely, these are invoked but not visible.
Aeschylus	<i>Suppliants</i>	Luxurious, barbarian clothing for Chorus	234-237, 903-904	Pelasgus and the Herald both remark about the women's clothing.

Aeschylus	<i>Suppliants</i>	Girdles/belts for the Chorus.	457, 465	The women threaten to hang themselves with these.
Aeschylus? ²²⁷	<i>Prometheus Bound</i>	Rocky cliffs	4-5, 20	This is the setting, but Prometheus is later bound to a rock or cliff face on stage.
Aeschylus?	<i>Prometheus Bound</i>	Adamantine bonds, which Hephaestus uses on Prom.	6, 19, 54 (“ψάλια,” “harness”), et al.	Specific bonds: a wedge through chest (64-65), around torso (71), around legs (74).
Aeschylus?	<i>Prometheus Bound</i>	Hammer for Hephaestus	56	Heph. drives in the bonds with a hammer.
Aeschylus?	<i>Prometheus Bound</i>	Fetters or nails	76	Heph. drives them in to hold the bonds to the rock.
Aeschylus?	<i>Prometheus Bound</i>	“Fishing-net” or a surrounding bond (ἀμφίβληστρον)	81	Heph. says it is around Prometheus’ legs. It may be one of the bonds mentioned earlier.
Aeschylus?	<i>Prometheus Bound</i>	Winged car(s) for the Chorus	135	The Chorus of Oceanids claims to arrive in winged cars, though these may not be staged.
Aeschylus?	<i>Prometheus Bound</i>	Winged, four-legged bird for Oceanus to ride	286, 395	The exact creature is unclear. It could be staged with the mechane or may be left unstaged.
Aeschylus?	<i>Prometheus Bound</i>	Cow’s horns for Io	588	Io points them out, but no one interacts with them.
Aeschylus	<i>Agamemnon</i>	Staffs for Chorus	75	Staffs show the age of the elders.

²²⁷ Here and for *Rhesus*, I include a question mark with the traditionally ascribed playwright’s name, in acknowledgment of the complex scholarly debates over authorship of these two plays.

Aeschylus	<i>Agamemnon</i>	Olive wreath for Herald	493-494	Chorus sees this as an indication that he brings the news.
Aeschylus	<i>Agamemnon</i>	Chariot or carriage for Agamemnon and Cassandra	906, 1039, 1054	Clytemnestra and the Chorus refer to it. It enters at least by line 810.
Aeschylus	<i>Agamemnon</i>	Fine, purple, ornate fabrics	908-911 et al.	Clytemnestra orders servants to cast them on his path.
Aeschylus	<i>Agamemnon</i>	Agamemnon's shoes	944	Ag. calls for someone to take them off.
Aeschylus	<i>Agamemnon</i>	Cassandra's staff and prophetic bands	1266-1267	Cassandra takes them off and tramples them.
Aeschylus	<i>Agamemnon</i>	Agamemnon's corpse (in a net? – 1392-1393, 1492)	1372 ff.; see especially 1404	Clytemnestra indicates the dead Ag. He may be wrapped in a net.
Aeschylus	<i>Agamemnon</i>	Cassandra's corpse	1440-1447	It appears with Agamemnon's corpse, but no one mentions it until here, where Clytemnestra does.
Aeschylus	<i>Agamemnon</i>	Sword for Clytemnestra	1496 et al. and implicit	She implies (and Chorus confirms at 1496) that she killed Agamemnon with a sword, which she may still hold.
Aeschylus	<i>Agamemnon</i>	Swords for soldiers	1651	Aegisthus orders soldiers to keep their swords ready.
Aeschylus	<i>Libation Bearers</i>	Agamemnon's tomb	4, et al.	Setting, but Orestes and Electra interact with it, making offerings and prayers.

Aeschylus	<i>Libation Bearers</i>	Lock of Orestes' hair	6-7, 168, et al.	Orestes offers it at Agamemnon's tomb, and Electra finds it.
Aeschylus	<i>Libation Bearers</i>	Black clothing for Chorus, Electra	10-12	Orestes notes their clothing, which indicates mourning. The women may tear them.
Aeschylus	<i>Libation Bearers</i>	Libations	24, 87 ff.	Electra brings them, escorted by the Chorus. She pours them out at 124 ff.
Aeschylus	<i>Libation Bearers</i>	Footprints	206	Not a prop and probably not visible but still a recognition token.
Aeschylus	<i>Libation Bearers</i>	Piece of weaving or a garment	231	Size is unclear. Orestes shows it to Electra as a recognition token.
Aeschylus	<i>Libation Bearers</i>	Luggage for Orestes	675-676	He may carry it as part of his disguise.
Aeschylus	<i>Libation Bearers</i>	Clytemnestra's garment	896-898	She bares her breast to Orestes.
Aeschylus	<i>Libation Bearers</i>	Sword for Orestes	Implicit	He likely carries and shows a sword.
Aeschylus	<i>Libation Bearers</i>	Corpses of Cly. and Aegisthus	973-974 ff.	Orestes reveals them for all to see.
Aeschylus	<i>Libation Bearers</i>	Net or robe that caught Agamemnon	981 ff.	Orestes indicates it and tells someone to spread it out for display.
Aeschylus	<i>Eumenides</i>	Navel-stone in the Temple of Apollo	40	Orestes clings to this center stone.
Aeschylus	<i>Eumenides</i>	Sword for Orestes	42	Pythia says he holds a drawn sword.
Aeschylus	<i>Eumenides</i>	Olive branch for Orestes	43-45	Pythia says he holds an olive branch with a wreath of wool.

Aeschylus	<i>Eumenides</i>	Chairs for Furies	46-47	Pythia notes them.
Aeschylus	<i>Eumenides</i>	Apollo's bow	181 ff.	Apollo threatens the Furies with it.
Aeschylus	<i>Eumenides</i>	Athena's aegis	404	This may be more of a costume than a prop.
Aeschylus	<i>Eumenides</i>	Etruscan trumpet	567-568	Athena calls for it to be sounded.
Aeschylus	<i>Eumenides</i>	Votes and voting urns	742-743	Athena and judges vote on Orestes' fate; others count the votes.
Aeschylus	<i>Eumenides</i>	Torches for the procession	1005, 1022	Athena (and others?) escort(s) the Eumenides with torches.
Aeschylus	<i>Eumenides</i>	Red/purple robes for Eumenides	1028	These may or may not appear on stage.
Sophocles	<i>Ajax</i>	Slaughtered livestock, etc.	346 ff.	These are probably on stage but may not function as props.
Sophocles	<i>Ajax</i>	Ajax's sword, previously Hector's	658, 815 ff.	Ajax may have it earlier, but he first indicates it here.
Sophocles	<i>Ajax</i>	Ajax's corpse	898 ff.	The corpse may appear earlier, but Tecmessa indicates it at 898.
Sophocles	<i>Ajax</i>	Cloth or garment	915-916, 1003	This is used to cover the corpse.
Sophocles	<i>Ajax</i>	Locks of hair and something to cut them	1173-1179	Teucer cuts locks of hair and gives them to Eurysaces for adorning the corpse and for supplication.
Sophocles	<i>Ajax</i>	Tripod, armor, shovel, and more	1402 ff.	Teucer calls for many things to begin the burial, but they probably do not appear on stage.

Sophocles	<i>Electra</i>	Libations and possibly hair offerings	52	Orestes intends to offer them, and presumably has them.
Sophocles	<i>Electra</i>	Bronze urn, supposedly with Orestes' ashes	54, 1113-1114 ff.	It is hidden in the bushes, then given to Electra, then taken inside the palace.
Sophocles	<i>Electra</i>	Electra's bad clothing	190-191	She indicates it, but she may not interact with it.
Sophocles	<i>Electra</i>	Offerings	326-327, 405 ff.	Chrysothemis carries them but decides not to offer them.
Sophocles	<i>Electra</i>	Electra's girdle and locks of hair	448-452	Electra convinces Chrysothemis to substitute these for Clytemnestra's offerings.
Sophocles	<i>Electra</i>	Clytemnestra's offerings	634 ff.	Clytemnestra's attendant carries these for her; Cly. offers them to Apollo.
Sophocles	<i>Electra</i>	Orestes' seal, which was Ag.'s	1222	This serves as a recognition token.
Sophocles	<i>Electra</i>	Clytemnestra's corpse or a covered bier	1466 ff.	Orestes reveals something to Aegisthus.
Sophocles	<i>Electra</i>	Orestes' sword	Implicit	No specific reference, but he probably has one to threaten Aegisthus.
Sophocles	<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>	Boughs, wreaths	2-3, 142-143	The people of Thebes wear them as suppliants.
Sophocles	<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>	Crown of bay leaves	82-83	Creon wears it, indicating a triumphant return from the oracle.
Sophocles	<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>	Garlands, incense	911-913	Iocasta brings them and offers them to Apollo.

Sophocles	<i>Antigone</i>	Haemon's corpse	1257	Creon carries it on stage, according to the Chorus.
Sophocles	<i>Antigone</i>	Eurydice's corpse	1293	Chorus says Creon can see the news of her death, that it is no longer hidden indoors.
Sophocles	<i>Women of Trachis</i>	Poisoned tunic	580, 607-615	Deineira shows it to the Chorus, then gives it to Lichas, who takes it off stage to Heracles.
Sophocles	<i>Women of Trachis</i>	Litter for the dying Heracles	901, 971 ff.	The Nurse mentions that Hyllus is preparing a litter; it comes on at 971, carrying Heracles.
Sophocles	<i>Philoctetes</i>	Philoctetes' cave, rags hanging outside; bed, cup, stones inside	33-39	It is possible that no one actually picks up or manipulates any, and many may be off stage or unstaged.
Sophocles	<i>Philoctetes</i>	Philoctetes points out his "wild" appearance.	226	Probably just costume pieces, not manipulated as props.
Sophocles	<i>Philoctetes</i>	Odysseus' sword	1255	He puts his hand on the hilt as a threat.
Sophocles	<i>Philoctetes</i>	Arrow	1299	Philoctetes draws the bow and aims an arrow at Odysseus. Arrows may be on stage earlier as well.
Sophocles	<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>	Rough rock	19, et al.	Oedipus sits on it.
Sophocles	<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>	Statue of Colonus	59, et al.	The Athenian man indicates it when explaining where they are.

Sophocles	<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>	Etnean colt	311-321	Antigone describes Ismene riding on it as she approaches. It probably does not come on stage.
Sophocles	<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>	Thessalian sun hat for Ismene	313-314	Antigone says Ismene is wearing one, but no one interacts with it.
Sophocles	<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>	Oedipus' bad clothing, appearance	1256-1261	Polynices points out his appearance, but it remains a costume, not prop.
Sophocles	<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>	Food/provisions for Oedipus	1263	Polynices says Oedipus carries food as wretched as his appearance. It may or may not be staged.
Euripides	<i>Cyclops</i> ²²⁸	Silenus' iron rake	32-33	He says he needs to sweep with it before Cyclops returns.
Euripides	<i>Cyclops</i>	Empty vessels, pails for Odysseus and his men	87-89	As they approach, Silenus says they carry empty jars for food and pails for water.
Euripides	<i>Cyclops</i>	Wineskin	145 ff.	Odysseus produces it for Silenus.
Euripides	<i>Cyclops</i>	Cup	152	Odysseus gives it to Silenus for the wine.
Euripides	<i>Cyclops</i>	Flocks and cheese	188-190, 224-227	Silenus gives them to Odysseus in exchange for wine.
Euripides	<i>Cyclops</i>	Club for Cyclops	210-211	He brandishes it when he enters.

²²⁸ Note that *Cyclops* is a satyr play, not a tragedy. I include it here for the sake of comparison and because it is traditionally included with volumes of tragedies, being that it is the only extant satyr play. I do not, however, include props from *Cyclops* in my discussion in Chapter 2 or in the categorization of tragic props in Appendix II.

Euripides	<i>Cyclops</i>	Sword for Odysseus	456	Odysseus says he has sharpened a stake (off stage) with “this” sword.
Euripides	<i>Cyclops</i>	Mixing bowl of wine	545 ff.	Silenus puts it behind Cyclops, and they later drink from it. Probably on stage earlier as well.
Euripides	<i>Cyclops</i>	Crown or garland	558-559	Silenus seems to crown Cyclops.
Euripides	<i>Cyclops</i>	Cliff or crag by Cyclops’ cave	683-684	Cyclops collides with it.
Euripides	<i>Alcestis</i>	Apollo’s bow and arrows	34-35, 39	Death points them out, asking if Apollo intends to try to prevent him from taking Alcestis.
Euripides	<i>Alcestis</i>	Death’s sword	74-76	Death indicates it, which he will use to cut a bit of Alcestis’ hair and mark her as his.
Euripides	<i>Alcestis</i>	Mat/litter for Alcestis	232 ff., especially 267	Implicit, but Alcestis cannot support herself and lies down at 267.
Euripides	<i>Alcestis</i>	Admetus’ hair cut for mourning	512	Heracles notes it. This is a costume piece but a change from Admetus’ earlier appearance.
Euripides	<i>Alcestis</i>	Finery for the dead Alcestis	611-613, 618	Admetus’ father’s servants carry it when they enter.

Euripides	<i>Alcestis</i>	Alcestis' corpse	393 ff., 606 ff., 729	She dies on stage, so this played by an actor but carried off stage as if an object. If the servants come onto the stage space when carrying her to the tomb, the body reappears as a dummy at 606 ff.
Euripides	<i>Alcestis</i>	Garlands for Heracles	759-760, 831-832	The servant describes him as garlanded with myrtle; Heracles later refers to his head as garlanded.
Euripides	<i>Alcestis</i>	Shorn hair, black clothes for servants	818-819	This would be a change from earlier, but the lines are bracketed.
Euripides	<i>Alcestis</i>	Veil for Alcestis (possibly)	1008-1121	No specific reference, but Admetus does not recognize her until Heracles tells him to look at her (and removes the veil?).
Euripides	<i>Alcestis</i>	Clothing and adornment of a young woman	1050	Costume, but Admetus specifically describes it thus.
Euripides	<i>Medea</i>	Poisoned gown and diadem	950-951, 956	Medea orders a servant to bring them out; she gives them to her children to take to Jason's bride.
Euripides	<i>Medea</i>	Sword for Medea (maybe)	1244	She tells herself to "take the sword," but she probably does not have a physical sword with her here.

Euripides	<i>Medea</i>	Gates and/or door	1317-1318	Medea asks Jason why he rattles the gates and tries to get through the door. It is a set piece, but Jason interacts with it.
Euripides	<i>Medea</i>	Chariot of Helios	1321-1322 ff.	The exact staging is very unclear, but it keeps her out of Jason's reach.
Euripides	<i>Medea</i>	Corpses of Medea's and Jason's two sons	1377 and implicit	Medea has them with her in the chariot.
Euripides	<i>Children of Heracles</i>	Altars	33	Iolaus and Heracles' sons are sitting at an altar in supplication.
Euripides	<i>Children of Heracles</i>	Suppliant wreaths	71	Iolaus refers to their wreaths as the herald tries to pull them away from the altar.
Euripides	<i>Children of Heracles</i>	Herald's clothing is Greek	130-131	Demophon notes this, but it remains a costume, not prop.
Euripides	<i>Children of Heracles</i>	Maiden daughter of Heracles asks Iolaus to cover her with her garments when she dies.	560-563	This is not enacted on stage, but the request is similar to other examples of covering.
Euripides	<i>Children of Heracles</i>	Iolaus asks the boys to set him down on the altar and cover him with his garments.	603-604	This is enacted on stage, and it shows Iolaus' grief. His clothes function as a sort of prop.
Euripides	<i>Hippolytus</i>	Garland	73-83	Hippolytus puts it on the statue of Artemis.
Euripides	<i>Hippolytus</i>	Statue of Artemis	73 ff., implicit	Hippolytus garlands it.

Euripides	<i>Hippolytus</i>	Statue of Aphrodite	101, 115-116	The servant indicates it, in warning to Hipp.
Euripides	<i>Hippolytus</i>	Bed or mat for Phaedra	179-180	The Nurse says her sickbed is outside.
Euripides	<i>Hippolytus</i>	Headdress or veil for Phaedra	201-202, 243-250	Phaedra calls for someone to take it off, then asks the Nurse to put it back on, and she does.
Euripides	<i>Hippolytus</i>	Ambassador garland for Theseus	806-807	The garland indicates success at the oracle.
Euripides	<i>Hippolytus</i>	Phaedra's corpse	808-811, ff.	Theseus calls for the servants to open the door and show him his wife; the Chorus then addresses her.
Euripides	<i>Hippolytus</i>	Tablet in dead Phaedra's hand	856 ff.	Theseus sees it in her hand and reads it. He says it "shouts" (876).
Euripides	<i>Hippolytus</i>	Hippolytus' mangled body	1341 ff.	This is the actor, but he is supported by attendants or carried on a litter. He seems to die on stage, around 1458.
Euripides	<i>Hippolytus</i>	Arrows for Artemis	1420-1422	She says she will punish a mortal Aphrodite loves with "these" arrows.
Euripides	<i>Hippolytus</i>	Garments to cover Hippolytus' face	1457-1458	Hippolytus asks Theseus to cover his face as he dies.
Euripides	<i>Andromache</i>	Shrine of Thetis	43-44	Andromache sits here as a suppliant.
Euripides	<i>Andromache</i>	Gold, elaborate clothing for Hermione	147-148	Hermione specifically indicates it but may not interact with it

Euripides	<i>Andromache</i>	Bonds for Andromache	425, 717-720	Menelaus orders slaves to bind her hands. Peleus later releases her.
Euripides	<i>Andromache</i>	Scepter for Peleus	588	He threatens Menelaus with it.
Euripides	<i>Andromache</i>	Hermione's veil, clothing in disarray	830-832	She casts away her veil, tears at her clothing.
Euripides	<i>Andromache</i>	Neoptolemus' corpse	1166 ff.	Attendants carry it on stage to Peleus.
Euripides	<i>Hecuba</i>	Cloak for Odysseus	342-344	Odysseus hides his right hand in it to avoid Hecuba's supplication.
Euripides	<i>Hecuba</i>	Polyxena's garments	432-434	She asks Odysseus to wrap her garment around her head and lead her away.
Euripides	<i>Hecuba</i>	Hecuba's garments	486-487	She lies wrapped in them, in grief.
Euripides	<i>Hecuba</i>	Polydorus' corpse	679-680 ff.	It may be brought on stage at 658.
Euripides	<i>Hecuba</i>	Polydorus' clothes are Trojan	734-735	Agamemnon notes this. They are props only in the sense of being on a corpse.
Euripides	<i>Hecuba</i>	Corpses of Polymestor's sons	1049 ff.	Polymestor is also blinded and staggering.
Euripides	<i>Suppliant Women</i>	Suppliant branches for Chorus	10, et al.	They later place them on the ground around Aethra, then pick them up later.
Euripides	<i>Suppliant Women</i>	Adrastus' head is covered	110-112	Theseus tells him to uncover it. It may be covered for supplication, mourning, or shame.

Euripides	<i>Suppliant Women</i>	Aethra holds her garments before her eyes	286-288	She weeps in grief for the Chorus women. Theseus says she does this.
Euripides	<i>Suppliant Women</i>	Five corpses on biers	766, 794 ff.	They process off with Theseus and Adrastus at 954.
Euripides	<i>Suppliant Women</i>	Evadne's finery	1054	Iphis asks why she has adorned herself in this way. It probably remains a costume, not prop.
Euripides	<i>Suppliant Women</i>	Urns with bones or ashes of the dead	1114 ff.	Chorus sees the boys approaching with these.
Euripides	<i>Electra</i>	Water jug for Electra	55-56, 107-110, 140	Electra says she does this to show Aegisthus' outrage against her to the gods.
Euripides	<i>Electra</i>	Electra's dirty clothes, short hair	184-185, 241	This is a costume but very important and could be manipulated.
Euripides	<i>Electra</i>	Altar near the house	216	Electra says men are hiding near it, but they probably do not interact with it specifically.
Euripides	<i>Electra</i>	Sword for Orestes	225	Electra notes it.
Euripides	<i>Electra</i>	Lamb, garlands, cheese, wine	493 ff.	The Old Man brings these for Electra and guests.
Euripides	<i>Electra</i>	Tattered clothes for Old Man	501-502	He says he wants to wipe his eyes on them.
Euripides	<i>Electra</i>	Lock of hair from the tomb	520-521	Old Man tells Electra to put it against her own hair. He may or may not have it on stage.
Euripides	<i>Electra</i>	Garlands for Electra	870-873, 882 ff.	Electra garlands Orestes and Pylades.

Euripides	<i>Electra</i>	Aegisthus' corpse	880 ff., especially 895; 1172 ff.	Orestes brings it on at 880, indicates it at 895, and drags it off at 959-961.
Euripides	<i>Electra</i>	Clytemnestra's finery	966	Orestes notes this as she approaches.
Euripides	<i>Electra</i>	Cart/chariot for Clytemnestra	966, 998, 1135-1136	It may come on stage.
Euripides	<i>Electra</i>	Clytemnestra's corpse (with Aegisthus')	1172 ff.	Chorus announces the sight. Electra and Orestes later refer to them.
Euripides	<i>Electra</i>	Garment to cover Clytemnestra's body	1227-1232	Orestes and Electra cover her, at Orestes' suggestion.
Euripides	<i>Heracles</i>	Altar to Zeus the Savior	48	Megara and the children are suppliants at it.
Euripides	<i>Heracles</i>	Staffs for Chorus	107-110, 254	Their first song emphasizes their old age and trouble walking.
Euripides	<i>Heracles</i>	Funeral clothing for Megara, Amphitryon, children	442-443, 329-335, 562-563	Megara asks Lycus to let the go inside and adorn themselves before being killed. Heracles later tells them to take off the adornments from their hair.
Euripides	<i>Heracles</i>	Heracles' clothing	520-522, 623-633	The children cling to his clothes.
Euripides	<i>Heracles</i>	Club for Heracles	570	He probably also carries his bow and arrows.
Euripides	<i>Heracles</i>	Corpses of children and Megara	1032-1033 ff.	Chorus notes them when the interior scene is revealed.

Euripides	<i>Heracles</i>	Ropes, pillars, with Heracles bound to them	1035-1038, 1123	Messenger describes this; it is revealed around 1029; Amphytrion loosens the bonds at 1123.
Euripides	<i>Heracles</i>	Bow and arrows on the ground	1098-1100	Heracles sees them scattered as he awakens.
Euripides	<i>Heracles</i>	Garment for Amphytrion to veil his eyes	1111-1112	He veils his eyes, weeping; Heracles asks why he does so.
Euripides	<i>Heracles</i>	Garments to cover Heracles' head	1159, 1200-1204 ff.	He wants to cover himself so that Theseus will not look at him and be polluted.
Euripides	<i>Trojan Women</i>	Torches for Cassandra	308 ff.	Talthybius exclaims at the sight of fire; Cassandra enters with torches; he takes them from her at 348.
Euripides	<i>Trojan Women</i>	Garlands, sacred clothing for Cassandra	329-330, 451-452	She throws them on the ground before exiting.
Euripides	<i>Trojan Women</i>	Pallet or mat for Hecuba	507-508	She asks to be led back to her pallet on the ground.
Euripides	<i>Trojan Women</i>	Wagon carrying Andromache, Astyanax, and booty	568-569 ff.	Chorus describes them on the wagon. Talthybius returns and takes away Astyanax.
Euripides	<i>Trojan Women</i>	Finery for Helen	1023	Hecuba reproaches her for her finery.
Euripides	<i>Trojan Women</i>	Astyanax's corpse on Hector's shield	1118-1122 ff. (1156 for shield)	Chorus calls out to look at him, as Talthybius and attendants bring it on stage.

Euripides	<i>Trojan Women</i>	Adornments for Astyanax's corpse	1207-1208 ff.	Attendants bring them out; Hecuba adorns the corpse.
Euripides	<i>Trojan Women</i>	Torches for Talthybius and his men	1256-1258	Chorus indicates them before the men enter. The men set fire to the city.
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia among the Taurians</i>	Artemis' temple, altar; trophies of victims hanging	34, 72-76	Orestes and Pylades note the "trophies." Most likely, no one interacts with them, and they remain elements of the set.
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia among the Taurians</i>	Libations for Iphigenia (in vessels or bowls)	159 ff.	Iphigenia pours them out for Orestes and Agamemnon.
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia among the Taurians</i>	Bonds for Orestes and Pylades	456-457	Chorus announces their approach, with hands bound. Servants release them at Iphigenia's order, at 468-469.
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia among the Taurians</i>	Tablet/letter for Iphigenia	727 ff.	Iphigenia brings it on. She later gives it to Pylades, who gives it to Orestes.
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia among the Taurians</i>	Statue of Artemis	1157 ff.	Iphigenia carries it out of the temple. It must be small.
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia among the Taurians</i>	Finery for Artemis, lambs, torches, and other objects for purification	1222-1225	Iphigenia requests these from Thoas, and servants bring them out at 1222.
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia among the Taurians</i>	Clothing covering Orestes' and Pylades' heads	1207, 1222	Their heads are covered to prevent pollution. Their hands are bound.
Euripides	<i>Ion</i>	Laurel boughs for Ion	79-80, 103-104, 112	Hermes describes him coming out with laurel made into a broom.

Euripides	<i>Ion</i>	Bow for Ion	108, 158 ff.	He says he will keep away the birds with it.
Euripides	<i>Ion</i>	Vessels of water	434-436	Ion says he will fill vessels with water but probably goes off stage to do it. These may never be on stage.
Euripides	<i>Ion</i>	Staff for Old Man	743-744	Creusa helps support him.
Euripides	<i>Ion</i>	Garments for Old Man	967	He covers his head in grief after hearing Creusa's story.
Euripides	<i>Ion</i>	Golden vessel with Gorgon's blood	1030	Creusa describes it at 1003-1027 and gives it to the Old Man at 1029 ff.
Euripides	<i>Ion</i>	Swords for mob of Delphians	1257-1258	Creusa says they come with swords.
Euripides	<i>Ion</i>	Altar and statue	1255, 1258, 1280, 1404	Creusa takes refuge here.
Euripides	<i>Ion</i>	Cradle, objects inside	1337-1338 ff.	Bit of weaving (1417-1425), golden snakes (1427-1432), garland of olive leaves (1433-1436).
Euripides	<i>Helen</i>	Tomb of Proteus, leaves on it	63-65, 528-529 ff., 798	Helen takes refuge on it as a suppliant. Menelaus later cuts her off as she tries to run back to it.
Euripides	<i>Helen</i>	Menelaus' rags	420-422, 544-545, 554, 1079-1080, 1204	Menelaus, Helen, and Theoclymenus all point out his rags. They become a tool in their trick.
Euripides	<i>Helen</i>	Torches for Theonoe's servants	865 ff.	They cleanse the air with them.

Euripides	<i>Helen</i>	Sword for Menelaus	983, 1044, 1086	He talks as if he has a sword, but he is in rags and totally destitute, so it is possible that he does not have one.
Euripides	<i>Helen</i>	Helen's white vs. black clothes	1087-1089, 1186 ff.	She changes from white to black clothes and also cuts her hair and tears her cheeks to show mourning.
Euripides	<i>Helen</i>	Dogs, hunting nets for Theoclymenus	1169-1170	He enters with them and tells servants to take them inside.
Euripides	<i>Helen</i>	Bull, bedding, armor, fruits	1255 ff., 1390-1391, 1410-1411, 1436-1437	Menelaus requests these, and some of them may come on stage, e.g. armor.
Euripides	<i>Helen</i>	New clothes for Menelaus	1296-1297, 1382-1384	Helen takes him off stage and dresses him in new clothes.
Euripides	<i>Helen</i>	Armor, shield, spear, panoply for Menelaus	1375-1381	Menelaus gains these with his new clothes.
Euripides	<i>Helen</i>	Sword for Theoclymenus	1632 ff., 1656	He threatens to kill Theonoe, but it is unclear whether he has a weapon.
Euripides	<i>Phoenician Women</i>	Ladder	100	Antigone climbs a ladder to a high room to look out. The ladder may not be visible.
Euripides	<i>Phoenician Women</i>	Golden armor for Polynices	168-169	Antigone sees it; he presumably wears it when he comes on stage.
Euripides	<i>Phoenician Women</i>	Sword and sheath for Polynices	267, 277	Polynices says he carries his sword in his hand for fear of treachery. He sheathes it at 277.

Euripides	<i>Phoenician Women</i>	Jocasta's short hair and ragged, dark clothes	322-326	She says she has cut her hair and put on these clothes in grief. This remains just a costume.
Euripides	<i>Phoenician Women</i>	Armor and weapons for Eteocles	779-780	He calls for them, but then he exits, so these may not appear on stage.
Euripides	<i>Phoenician Women</i>	Lot tablets for Teiresias	838-840	He and his daughter bring them on stage.
Euripides	<i>Phoenician Women</i>	Golden crown or wreath for Teiresias	856, 858	He wears it as a sign of victory from a war in Athens.
Euripides	<i>Phoenician Women</i>	Corpses of Polynices, Eteocles, Jocasta	1480-1484 ff.	Chorus announces the arrival of the bodies. Antigone holds Polynices' body at 1661. Oedipus touches the bodies at 1693 ff.
Euripides	<i>Phoenician Women</i>	Veil for Antigone	1490	She casts it away.
Euripides	<i>Phoenician Women</i>	Yellow robe for Antigone	1491	She loosens it in her mourning.
Euripides	<i>Phoenician Women</i>	Hair for Antigone	1524 ff.	She tears out hair and casts it on the bodies.
Euripides	<i>Phoenician Women</i>	Staff for Oedipus	1539-1540	Oedipus enters, using a staff as a guide.
Euripides	<i>Orestes</i>	Bow for Orestes	268 ff.	He refers to his bow but may not actually have one. Kovacs notes that the scholia say that he had one in early productions but not in later ones.

Euripides	<i>Orestes</i>	Garment or cloth for Electra	294	Orestes tells her to uncover her head, so she must have covered it during his fit.
Euripides	<i>Orestes</i>	Menelaus' rich clothing	348-351	This remains just a costume, but it contrasts significantly with Orestes and Electra.
Euripides	<i>Orestes</i>	Tyndareus' black clothing, shorn hair	457-458	Again, just a costume but a significant one.
Euripides	<i>Orestes</i>	Swords for Orestes and Pylades	1223, 1504, 1575	Pylades mentions these in his plan, at 1125.
Euripides	<i>Orestes</i>	Torches for Orestes, Pylades, and Electra	1573	They are threatening to burn the house and kill Hermione. Menelaus notes the torches.
Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Tomb of Semele	6-8, 596-599	Dionysus indicates it, saying it still smolders with Zeus' fire. Characters may or may not interact with it.
Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Drums for the Chorus	58-61, 124	Dionysus tells them to take up their drums and make noise. During their song, the Chorus refers to "this drum."
Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Bacchant clothing (fawnskin, ivy crown) and thyrsus for Cadmus	174-177, 180-189, 250-254, 363	He carries an ivied staff (thyrsus). His costume is prop-like in its significance, and there could be interaction with it.

Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Bacchant clothing, thyrsus for Teiresias	174-177, 205, 248-251	See Cadmus' costume, above.
Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Ivy crown for Cadmus to try to put on Pentheus	341-344	Cadmus tells Pentheus to come here and be garlanded, but he rejects it.
Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Bonds for Dionysus' hands	437-440, 451	The Servant brings Dionysus on stage, bound. Pentheus orders that his hands be released. He may have him bound again at 505.
Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Dionysus' hair	455-456, 493-494	Pentheus notes Dionysus' long hair. He seems to cut locks of it, so the wig could become a prop.
Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Thyrsus for Dionysus	495-497	Pentheus takes it away from him.
Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Falling stones, shaking palace	585 ff.	This is more a set than prop, but the changes are significant. This probably was not staged. See Chapter 3 for further discussion.
Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Woman's bacchant costume for Pentheus (dress, long hair, fawnskin, thyrsus)	821, 827-835, 914-915 ff.	Dionysus takes him inside and dresses him. When they come out, Dionysus adjusts his costume.
Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Headdress, loose curl	928-934	Dionysus points it out to Pentheus and fixes it.
Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Thyrsus for Pentheus	941-942	He asks Dionysus which hand he should use to hold it.

Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Pentheus' head on Agave's thyrsus	1139-1143, 1169-1175, 1214-1215, 1277-1284	The Messenger says she impaled Pentheus' head on her thyrsus. When she enters, she indicates what she thinks is a mountain lion cub.
Euripides	<i>Bacchae</i>	Pentheus' body parts, possibly on a stretcher of some sort	1216-1221, 1299	Cadmus brings Pentheus' body on stage. Since it is in pieces, he (or attendants) probably carry it on a stretcher.
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia at Aulis</i>	Letter/tablet for Agamemnon	34-41, 107-113 ff., 155-156, 307 ff.	Old Man describes Agamemnon writing it. Ag. gives it to him to deliver. Menelaus takes it from him (off stage), and they fight for it (on stage).
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia at Aulis</i>	Scepter for Menelaus	311	Menelaus threatens to hit the Old Man with it.
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia at Aulis</i>	Chariot for Clytemnestra and Iphigenia	599-600 ff.	They get down from the chariot. Clytemnestra tells attendants to stand in front of the horses.
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia at Aulis</i>	Bridal gifts	610-612	Clytemnestra orders attendants to take them out of the chariot.
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia at Aulis</i>	Baby Orestes	621 ff., 1119, 1241 ff., 1450	As a babe in arms, Orestes is a sort of prop here.
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia at Aulis</i>	Sword for Achilles	970	He tells Clytemnestra that he will defend Iphigenia with "this sword."

Euripides	<i>Iphigenia at Aulis</i>	Garments for Iphigenia to hold before her face	1122-1123	Agamemnon asks her why she holds them there.
Euripides	<i>Iphigenia at Aulis</i>	Armor for Achilles' men	1359	Achilles indicates his men with their armor, prepared to defend Iphigenia.
Euripides?	<i>Rhesus</i> ²²⁹	Spears, armor, etc. for Hector and soldiers	58, 99, et al.	Hector wants the soldiers to take up arms, but it is unclear when these weapons might be on stage.
Euripides?	<i>Rhesus</i>	Gold armor, shield with bells on rim for Rhesus	381-384	Chorus notes this and says the bells clang.
Euripides?	<i>Rhesus</i>	Spoils (weapons? armor?) for Odysseus and Diomedes	591-593	They say they are carrying spoils back to their camp, but it is unclear exactly what these are.
Euripides?	<i>Rhesus</i>	Spears, weapons for Chorus	675 ff.	Chorus stops Odysseus (and Diomedes?) and threatens him/them.
Euripides?	<i>Rhesus</i>	Corpse of Rhesus	886-888	One of the Muses appears carrying his body.

²²⁹ I include *Rhesus* here but not in Appendix II. The play is unusual, and its dating and authorship are strongly contested. I do include it in Appendix III, however, for its interesting use of gods on the stage.

APPENDIX II

CATEGORIES OF PROPS IN GREEK TRAGEDY

The following is an alternative organization of the items found in Appendix I, Catalogue of Props in Greek Tragedy. There are two separate categorization schemes, the first being a breakdown based on what the items are and the second being a classification of the various functions these props tend to have. The final section is a list of some common associations that adhere to the props found in Greek tragedy. This list is by no means complete, and I have not listed particular props for these, as such lists could vary with the performance or spectator and be very long and unstable. These associations are included merely as a guide for thinking about the concepts, connotations, and moods that most often accompany these props.

Costume pieces to which characters specifically call attention are included here under “Costume Pieces” and occasionally other categories, though they are not actually props unless characters interact with them in ways other than simply wearing them. In the main part of the Costume Pieces section, I include a brief parenthetical at the end of an entry if the item is a costume piece and not used as a prop. I choose to include some costume pieces that are not, by my definition, props because those particular costumes function similarly to props in some way. The usage of a few items is ambiguous, and I give the label I think most likely and note the ambiguity as appropriate. Note that these costume pieces and ambiguous items may occur in other categories as well, but the identifying parenthetical notes are typically restricted to their first listings, found in the Costume Pieces section.

Part I: Props Organized by What They Are

Weapons:

1. Quiver (empty?) for Xerxes: Aesch., *Persians* 1020, 1022
2. Armor, weapons for soldiers: Aesch., *Seven against Thebes* 31
3. Swords for guards: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 1651
4. Orestes may carry a sword: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* (throughout, especially 891 ff.)
5. Sword for Orestes: Aesch., *Eumenides* 43-45
6. Apollo's bow: Aesch., *Eumenides* 181 ff.
7. Ajax's sword, of Hector: Soph., *Ajax* 658, 815 ff.
8. Orestes may carry a sword, particularly for the end of the play: Soph., *Electra*
9. Philoctetes' bow, of Heracles: Soph., *Philoctetes* 654 ff., 762 ff., et al.
10. Odysseus' sword: Soph., *Philoctetes* 1255
11. Arrow for Philoctetes' bow: Soph., *Philoctetes* 1299
12. Apollo's bow and arrows: Eur., *Alcestis* 34-35, 39
13. Death's sword: Eur., *Alcestis* 74-76
14. Medea *might* have a sword: Eur., *Medea* 1244
15. Arrows for Artemis (may or may not appear onstage): Eur., *Hippolytus* 1420-1422
16. Swords for mob of Delphians: Eur., *Ion* 1257-1258
17. Sword for Orestes: Eur. *Electra* 225
18. Club for Heracles: Eur., *Heracles* 570 et al.
19. Bow and arrows for Heracles: Eur., *Heracles* 571, 1098-1100, 1377
20. Bow for Ion: Eur., *Ion* 108, 158 ff.
21. Sword for Menelaus (H probably has one but may not.): Eur., *Helen* 1044, 1086
22. Theoclymenus' dogs and hunting nets: Eur., *Helen* 1169-1170
23. Armor, shield, spear, and panoply for Menelaus: Eur., *Helen* 1375-1381
24. Sword for Theoclymenus (unclear whether he has one as he makes his threats): Eur., *Helen* 1632, 1656
25. Golden armor/weapons (noticed by Antigone) and a sword (which Polynices notes) for Polynices: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 168-169, 267
26. Weapons, armor for Eteocles (He calls for them, then exits, so they may not come on stage.): Eur., *Phoenician Women* 779 ff.
27. Orestes may have a real or mimed bow to "fight" the Furies: Eur., *Orestes* 268 ff.
28. Swords for Orestes and Pylades: Eur., *Orestes* 1223
29. Achilles' sword: Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 970
30. Achilles' men come with armor and, presumably, weapons: Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 1359

Total²³⁰: 30

²³⁰ For each category, this total refers to the number of entries in the preceding list. It does not count each item individually. An entry for "swords" or "lamb, cheese, and wine," for example, would count as just one, for the purposes of this total. Note also that categories often include a few items that may or may not be present or be used in

Costume Pieces:

Clothing:

1. Persians are wearing elaborate Eastern dress, and the Chorus will tear their robes: Aesch., *Persians* 1060 (tearing; style is implicit) (costume)
2. Xerxes' rags: Aesch., *Persians* 834-837, 1017 (costume)
3. Chorus wearing luxurious robes and headbands that are not Greek: Aesch., *Suppliant Women* 234-237, 903-904 (costume)
4. Chorus wears girdles and belts that they threaten to use as nooses: Aesch., *Suppliant Women* 457
5. Agamemnon's shoes: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 944
6. Cassandra's prophetic insignia, which she casts off: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 1264 ff.
7. Chorus and Electra wear black garments for mourning: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 10-12
8. Orestes' piece of weaving or garment, made by Electra: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 231
9. Clytemnestra baring her breast: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 896-898
10. Furies' appearance, as described: Aesch., *Eumenides* 45 ff. (costume/mask)
11. Athena calls for the Eumenides to be dressed in red robes: Aesch., *Eumenides* 1028 (If this does happen on stage, these are props.)
12. Cloth/cloak to cover Ajax's body: Soph., *Ajax* 915-916, 1003
13. Poisoned tunic, given from Deinara to Heracles: Soph., *Women of Trachis* 580, 612, et al.
14. Electra's girdle, which Chrysothemis takes to offer on Agamemnon's tomb: Soph., *Electra* 448-452
15. Electra's bad clothing: Soph., *Electra* 190-191 (costume)
16. Oedipus' bad clothing: Soph., *Oedipus at Colonus* 1256-1261 (costume)
17. Finery for the dead Alcestis: Eur., *Alcestis* 611-613, 618
18. When Alcestis returns, she wears the clothes and adornment of a young woman: Eur., *Alcestis* 1050 (The clothing is not really a prop; the veil may be.)
19. Poisoned gown and diadem: Eur., *Medea* 950-951, 956
20. Herald wears Greek clothing: Eur., *Children of Heracles* 130-131 (costume)
21. Hermione's gold, elaborate clothes, later in disarray: Eur., *Andromache* 147-148, 830-832 (She throws her veil in 830-832, qualifying it as a prop. Other items are simply costumes.)
22. Odysseus hides his right hand in his cloak: Eur., *Hecuba* 342-344
23. Polyxena asks Odysseus to wrap a garment about her head and take her away: Eur., *Hecuba* 432-434
24. Hecuba lies wrapped in her garments: Eur., *Hecuba* 486-487
25. Polydorus' clothes are Trojan: Eur., *Hecuba* 734-735 (costume)
26. Adrastus' head is wrapped in his garments, and Theseus tells him to uncover it: Eur. *Suppliant Women* 110-112

such a way as to qualify for the category. I note the ambiguity of these items but still include them in the totals.

27. Theseus says that Aethra holds her clothing before her eyes, weeping: Eur. *Suppliant Women* 286-288
28. Evadne wears fine, elaborate clothes: Eur. *Suppliant Women* 1054-1055 (costume: Iphis comments on her clothing, and it suggests her suicide)
29. Electra's miserable clothing, short hair: Eur. *Electra* 107-110, 184-185, 241, 304 ff. (costume and the subject of many comments)
30. Old Man's clothing is ragged, and he wants to wipe his tears with the tatters: Eur. *Electra* 501-502
31. Clytemnestra's finery: Eur. *Electra* 966 (costume: Orestes comments on it)
32. Funeral clothing for Megara, Amphitryon, and children: Eur. *Heracles* 442-443 (probably just costume)
33. Amphitryon covers his eyes (with his clothes?) as Heracles wakes: Eur., *Heracles* 1111
34. Heracles wants to cover his head with his clothes so that Theseus will not look at him and be polluted: Eur., *Heracles* 1159, 1200-1204 ff.
35. Garlands, sacred clothing mark Cassandra as a seer: Eur., *Trojan Women* 451-452
36. Helen is dressed in finery: Eur., *Trojan Women* 1023 (costume)
37. Orestes' and Pylades' heads are covered, probably with their clothing: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 1207, 1222
38. Thoas covers his head with his clothing: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, 1217-1218
39. Menelaus' rags: Eur., *Helen* 420-422, 544-545, 554, 1079-1080, 1204 (This is costume but draws much attention; they could be props, depending on the performance.)
40. Helen's clothing change, from white to black (also cuts hair, bloodies cheeks): Eur., *Helen* 1087-1089, 1186 ff. (This could be either costume or prop, depending on performance.)
41. Menelaus bathes, gets new clothes more fitting of a king: Eur., *Helen* 1296-1297, 1382-1384 (likely just a costume: change happens off stage)
42. Jocasta has cut her hair and put on dark, ragged clothes to show her misfortune and pain for Polynices' exile: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 322-326 (The actor may or may not interact specifically with the costume.)
43. Antigone casts away her veil/mantle and lets her saffron robes fly open in her distress: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 1490-1491
44. Orestes is filthy, rough-looking: Eur., *Orestes* 219-220, 225-226, 387 (He may or may not interact specifically with his costume.)
45. Garment/veil to cover Electra's head (Orestes tells her to uncover her head after his fit): Eur., *Orestes* 294
46. Menelaus is splendidly dressed, contrasting his fortune with that of his relatives: Eur., *Orestes* 348-351 (costume)
47. Tyndareus is in black, with cut hair for mourning: Eur., *Orestes* 467-468 (costume)
48. Phrygian slave's Asian boots, etc.: Eur., *Orestes* 1366 ff. (probably just costume)
49. Cadmus' bacchant clothing: Eur., *Bacchae* 180 et al. (Some items are likely props.)
50. Teiresias' bacchant clothing: Eur., *Bacchae* 205, 248-53 (Some are likely props.)

51. Dionysus' long hair: Eur., *Bacchae* 455, 493-94
52. Pentheus' female bacchant clothing, headdress, and thyrsus: Eur., *Bacchae* 914-915, 928-929, 941-942
53. Iphigenia covers her face with her clothes: Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 1122-1123

Sub-Total: 53²³¹

Headgear: Veils, Garlands, Etc.:

1. Chorus may be wearing Sidonian veils (They say they are tearing them, but it could be just an expression): Aesch., *Suppliant Women* 120-121
2. Cow's horns for Io: Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 588
3. Olive wreath on herald's head: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 493-494
4. Boughs/wreaths that suppliants wear: Soph., *Oedipus Tyrannus* 2-3, 142-143
5. Crown of bay leaves that Creon wears: Soph., *Oedipus Tyrannus* 82-83
6. Garlands, etc. for Heracles, for celebrating/reveling: Eur., *Alcestis* 759-760, 831-832
7. Veil for Alcestis when returns (possible, implicit): Eur., *Alcestis* 1121
8. Suppliant wreaths that children of Heracles wear: Eur., *Children of Heracles* 71
9. Veil or cover for Phaedra's head: Eur., *Hippolytus* 245, 250, 201-202
10. Theseus wears an ambassador garland: Eur., *Hippolytus* 806-807
11. Hermione's veil, which she throws: Eur., *Andromache*: 830-832
12. Electra puts a garland in Orestes' hair, gives another to Pylades: Eur. *Electra* 882
13. Garlands mark Cassandra as a seer: Eur., *Trojan Women* 451-452
14. Teiresias' golden crown/wreath: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 856
15. Antigone casts away her veil/mantle: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 1490-1491
16. Pentheus' headdress/snood: Eur., *Bacchae* 928-929

Sub-Total: 16

Armor:

1. Armor, weapons for soldiers: Aesch., *Seven against Thebes* 31
2. Greaves, other armor for Eteocles: Aesch., *Seven against Thebes* 675 ff. (props, if they appear, because he puts them on while on stage)
3. Armor from the temple, which Iolaus puts on: Eur., *Children of Heracles* 720 ff.
4. Achilles' men come with armor: Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 1359
5. Armor, shield, spear, and panoply for Menelaus: Eur., *Helen* 1375-1381
6. Golden armor/weapons for Polynices: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 168-169
7. Weapons, armor for Eteocles (He calls for them, then exits, so they may not come on stage.): Eur., *Phoenician Women* 779 ff.

Sub-Total: 7

Staffs:

1. Staffs for the Chorus of Elders: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 75

²³¹ This sub-total is, of course, of limited use because it includes many items that are really only used as costumes. My best guess is that about twenty of these are only costumes, but the exact usage of some is ambiguous, leaving this sub-total very rough.

2. Cassandra's staff: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 1266-1267
3. Chorus carries staffs: Eur. *Heracles* 107-110
4. Old Man's staff: Eur., *Ion* 743-44
5. Staff for Oedipus: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 1539-1540
6. Cadmus' ivied staff/thyrsus, which supports himself and Teiresias: Eur., *Bacchae* 363

Sub-Total: 6

Royal Regalia:

1. Peleus' scepter: Eur., *Andromache* 588
2. Menelaus' scepter: Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 311

Sub-Total: 2

Total for Costume Pieces: 84 (Very approximate: see Note 2.)

Religious/Ritual Items:

Altars, Statues, Etc.:

1. Tomb of Darius: Aesch., *Persians* 659 et al.
2. Rock/altar, with trident and possibly other markings: Aesch., *Suppliant Women* 189, 218, et al.
3. Altar with statues/images of gods: Aesch., *Seven against Thebes* 98
4. Navel/center-stone of Oracle of Delphi: Aesch., *Eumenides* 40
5. Statue of Colonus: Soph., *Oedipus at Colonus* 59, et al.
6. Altars: Eur., *Children of Heracles* 33
7. Statue of Aphrodite: Eur., *Hippolytus* 101
8. Shrine of Thetis: Eur., *Andromache* 43
9. Altar near the house: Eur. *Electra* 216
10. Altar to Zeus the Savior: Eur. *Heracles* 48
11. Temple of Artemis, altar, trophies of victims hanging: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 74-76
12. Small statue of Artemis, which Iphigenia carries: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 1157-1158
13. Altar (and statue?): Eur., *Ion* 1280, 1404
14. Tomb of Proteus: Eur., *Helen* 63-65, 798

Sub-Total: 14

Funerary Items/Other Offerings:

1. Queen's libations/offerings: Aesch., *Persians* 523-524, 607 ff.
2. Lock of hair from Orestes: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 7, 168, et al.
3. Libations from Electra to Agamemnon: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 87 ff.
4. Locks of hair, something to cut them: Soph., *Ajax* 1171-1172
5. Libations and other offerings Orestes brings for the tomb: Soph., *Electra* 52
6. Offerings Chrysothemis brings on behalf of Clytemnestra: Soph., *Electra* 326-327, 405 ff.
7. Electra's girdle and locks of hair from both sisters, which Chrysothemis takes to offer on Agamemnon's tomb: Soph., *Electra* 448-452

8. Fruits, offerings from Clytemnestra to Apollo: Soph., *Electra* 634 ff.
9. Garlands, incense that Iocasta offers to Apollo: Soph., *Oedipus Tyrannus* 911-913
10. Finery for the dead Alcestis: Eur., *Alcestis* 611-613, 618
11. Adornments for the dead Astyanax: Eur., *Trojan Women* 1207-8
12. Bowl, gold vessel holding libations: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 159 ff.
13. Hair that Antigone tears out and casts on the bodies of her mother and brothers: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 1524-1526 ff.
14. Helen's hair offering and libations, which she gives to Hermione to take to Clytemnestra's tomb: Eur., *Orestes* 113

Sub-Total: 14

Branches, Wreaths, Garlands, Etc.:

1. Olive branches for Chorus: Aesch., *Suppliant Women* 21-22, 191-192, 480 ff.
2. Orestes carries an olive branch: Aesch., *Eumenides* 43-45
3. Boughs/wreaths for suppliants: Soph., *Oedipus Tyrannus* 2-3, 142-143
4. Crown of bay leaves that Creon wears: Soph., *Oedipus Tyrannus* 82-83
5. Garlands that Iocasta offers to Apollo: Soph., *Oedipus Tyrannus* 911-913
6. Garlands, etc. for Heracles, for celebrating/reveling: Eur., *Alcestis* 759-760, 831-832
7. Suppliant wreaths for the children of Heracles: Eur., *Children of Heracles* 71
8. Garland that Hippolytus brings for Artemis: Eur., *Hippolytus* 73
9. Ambassador garland that Theseus wears: Eur., *Hippolytus* 806-807
10. Suppliant branches for Chorus: Eur., *Suppliant Women* 10
11. Garlands that the Old Man brings to Electra's house, along with other things: Eur. *Electra* 496
12. Electra puts a garland in Orestes' hair, gives another to Pylades: Eur. *Electra* 882
13. Garlands, sacred clothing mark Cassandra as a seer: Eur., *Trojan Women* 451-452
14. Laurel boughs, which Ion makes into a broom: Eur., *Ion* 79-80, 103-104, 112-113
15. Ivy crowns Cadmus and Teiresias wear, plus one Cadmus tries to put on Pentheus: Eur., *Bacchae* 205, 341-344
16. Golden crown/wreath for Teiresias: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 856

Sub-Total: 16

Other:

1. Cassandra's staff and prophetic bands: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 1266-1267
2. Vessels that Ion says he will fill with water as part of his duties at the Oracle (He may or may not do it on stage.): Eur., *Ion* 434-436 (may also include his broom of laurel and his bow here)
3. Lot tablets with auguries on them for Teiresias: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 838
4. Chorus may carry drums, possibly other bacchic items: Eur., *Bacchae* 124
5. Cadmus' bacchant clothing and thyrsus: Eur., *Bacchae* 180, 188, 363, et al.
6. Teiresias' bacchant clothing and (possibly) thyrsus: Eur., *Bacchae* 248-253
7. Dionysus' thyrsus, which Pentheus takes: Eur., *Bacchae* 495
8. Pentheus' female bacchant costume, headdress, thyrsus: Eur., *Bacchae* 914-915, 928-929, 941-942

9. Agave's thyrsus with Pentheus' head: Eur., *Bacchae* 1173-1175 et al.
10. Bridal gifts (if a wedding is considered a ritual): Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 610-612

Sub-Total: 10

Total for Religious/Ritual Items: 54

Mats/Litters/Biers:

1. Wheeled tent/carriage/litter for Xerxes: Aesch., *Persians* 1000-1001
2. Litter for dying Heracles: Soph., *Women of Trachis* 971 ff.
3. Some kind of mat or litter for Alcestis (possible): Eur., *Alcestis* 232 ff., especially 267
4. Phaedra's sickbed or mat: Eur., *Hippolytus* 179-180
5. Something to carry in the dying Hippolytus (possible: he may just be supported by attendants): Eur., *Hippolytus* 1347 ff.
6. 5 biers carrying the corpses of 5 of the 7 against Thebes: Eur. *Suppliant Women* 794
7. Hecuba may be lying on a mat: Eur., *Trojan Women* 507-8
8. Shield bears the body of Astyanax: Eur., *Trojan Women* 1136 ff.
9. Bed/mat for Orestes: Eur., *Orestes* 35 et al.
10. (Implicit) Some kind of stretcher carrying Pentheus' body parts: Eur., *Bacchae* 1216-1217

Total: 10 (possibly fewer)

Jars/Urns:

1. Jars to hold the Queen's libations/offerings: Aesch., *Persians* 523-524, 607 ff.
2. Jars to hold the libations Electra brings to Agamemnon: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 24, 87 ff.
3. Voting urns: Aesch., *Eumenides* 742-743
4. Jars (implicit) to hold the libations Orestes brings for the tomb: Soph., *Electra* 52
5. Jars holding offerings Chrysothemis brings on behalf of Clytemnestra: Soph., *Electra* 326-327, 405 ff.
6. Bronze urn, supposedly with Orestes' ashes: Soph., *Electra* 1113-1114 ff.
7. Some kind of urn or vessel (implicit) to hold the ashes/bones of the dead: Eur., *Suppliant Women* 1114 ff.
8. Water jug that Electra carries: Eur. *Electra* 55-56, 107-110
9. Something to hold the wine the Old Man brings to Electra's house: Eur., *Electra* 493 ff.
10. Bowl, gold vessel holding libations: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 159 ff.
11. Vessels that Ion says he will fill with water (he may or may not do it onstage): Eur., *Ion* 434-436
12. Jars to hold Helen's libations, which she gives to Hermione: Eur., *Orestes* 113

Total: 12

Household Items (jars, brooms, blankets, food, etc.):

1. Cloth/cloak to cover Ajax's body: Soph., *Ajax* 915-916, 1003
2. Items outside Philoctetes' cave: Soph., *Philoctetes*
3. Provisions for Oedipus: Soph., *Oedipus at Colonus* 1263

4. Water jug that Electra carries: Eur. *Electra* 55-56, 107-110
5. Lamb, cheese, wine that the Old Man brings to Electra's house: Eur., *Electra* 493 ff.
6. Broom of laurel boughs: Eur., *Ion* 79-80, 103-104, 112-113
7. Vessels that Ion says he will fill with water as part of his duties (he may or may not do it on stage): Eur., *Ion* 434-436
8. Cradle plus weaving and other items inside: Eur., *Ion* 1337-1338 ff.
9. Food and many other items that Menelaus requests (unclear which, if any, are ever on stage): Eur., *Helen* 1255 ff., 1390-1391
10. Blanket/cloak for Orestes: Eur., *Orestes* 42-44

Total: 10

Magical or Supernatural Items:

1. Hephaestus' hammer and unbreakable adamantine bonds: Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 6, 56, et al.
2. Philoctetes' bow, of Heracles: Soph., *Philoctetes* 654 ff., 762 ff., et al.
3. Poisoned tunic, from Deinara to Heracles: Soph., *Women of Trachis* 580, 612, et al.
4. Poisoned gown and diadem: Eur., *Medea* 950-951, 956
5. Medea's dragon chariot: Eur., *Medea* 1321-1322 ff.
6. Armor from the temple, which Iolaus puts on (This may not be magical, but it is supernatural in some way; it may or may not appear on stage): Eur., *Children of Heracles* 720 ff.
7. Golden vessel with Gorgon's blood: Eur., *Ion* 1030

Total: 7

Bonds/Ropes:

1. Bonds for Prometheus (together called a "psalia," harness, in line 54): Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 6, 19, et al. (for chest: 71, wedge through chest: 64-65, for legs: 74)
2. Nails to fix the bonds to the rock: Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 76
3. Fishing-net ("amphiblêstron") around Prometheus' legs: Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 81
4. Bonds for Andromache's hands: Eur., *Andromache* 425
5. Ropes that bind Heracles to pillars: Eur., *Heracles* 1035-1038
6. Bonds for Orestes and Pylades: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 456-457
7. Bonds for Dionysus' hands: Eur., *Bacchae* 451

Total: 7

Torches:

1. Torches for procession (possible): Aesch., *Eumenides* 1022
2. Torch Cassandra carries: Eur., *Trojan Women* 308 ff.
3. Torches for Talthybius and men: Eur., *Trojan Women* 1256-1258
4. Torches for Theonoe's servants: Eur., *Helen* 865 ff.
5. Torches for Orestes, Pylades, and Electra: Eur., *Orestes* 1573

Total: 5

Tablets:

1. Tablet in dead Phaedra's hand: Eur., *Hippolytus* 856-857
2. Tablet/letter for Iphigenia: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 727 ff.
3. Lot tablets with auguries on them for Teiresias: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 838
4. Tablet/letter for Agamemnon: Eur. *Iphigenia at Aulis* 35-36, et al.

Total: 4

Corpses:

1. Bodies of Eteocles and Polynices: Aesch., *Seven against Thebes* 848 ff.
2. Bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 1372 ff.
3. Bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 973-974 ff.
4. Ajax's body: Soph., *Ajax* 898 ff.
5. Clytemnestra's body or a covered bier: Soph., *Electra* 1466 ff.
6. Haemon's body, Eurydice's body: Soph., *Antigone* 1257, 1293
7. Alcestis' body: Eur., *Alcestis* 393 ff., 606 ff., 729
8. Bodies of Medea's and Jason's two sons: Eur., *Medea* 1377 and implicit
9. Phaedra's body: Eur., *Hippolytus* 808-811, ff.
10. Neoptolemus' body: Eur., *Andromache* 1166 ff.
11. Polydorus' body: Eur., *Hecuba* 679-680 ff.
12. Bodies of the sons of Polymestor: Eur., *Hecuba* 1049 ff.
13. Bodies of 5 of the 7 against Thebes, on biers: Eur. *Suppliant Women* 766, 794 ff.
14. Aegisthus' body: Eur., *Electra* 880 ff., especially 895; dragged off in 959-61
15. Clytemnestra's body: Eur., *Electra* 1172 ff.
16. Bodies of Megara and the children: Eur., *Heracles* 1032 ff.
17. Astyanax's body on Hector's shield: Eur., *Trojan Women* 1118 ff.
18. Bodies of Eteocles, Polyneices, and Jocasta: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 1480 ff.
19. Pentheus' head on Agave's thyrsus: Eur., *Bacchae* 1139-1143, 1169-1175, et al.
20. Pentheus' body parts: Eur., *Bacchae* 1216-1221, et al.
21. *Not* a corpse, but a body: the baby Orestes would most likely have been a prop: Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 621 ff., et al.

Total: 32²³² (plus the unclear number of children in *Heracles*)

Part II: Props Organized by What They Do**Basic, Practical Functions:**

Carry a dying person or corpse:

1. Litter for dying Heracles: Soph., *Women of Trachis* 971 ff.
2. Some kind of mat or litter for dying Alcestis (She may or may not be carried in on it; may lie down on it at 267.): Eur., *Alcestis* 232 ff., especially 267

²³² In contrast to all other totals in this appendix, this number reflects the total number of individual corpses, rather than the number of items in the list. Thus, for example, I count the bodies of Eteocles and Polynices in *Seven against Thebes* as two, rather than as one.

3. Something to carry in the dying Hippolytus (possible: he may just be supported by attendants): Eur., *Hippolytus* 1347 ff.
4. Five biers carry the corpses of five of the seven who led the attack against Thebes: Eur. *Suppliant Women* 794
5. Hector's shield carries the body of Astyanax: Eur., *Trojan Women* 1136 ff.
6. (*Implicit*) Whatever carries Pentheus' body parts: Eur., *Bacchae* 1216-1217

Sub-Total: 6

Carry a person (carts, chariots, etc.):

1. Queen returns without a carriage, so she must have had one for first entrance: Aesch., *Persians* 607 (giving information about earlier)
2. Wheeled tent/carriage for Xerxes: Aesch., *Persians* 1000-1013.
3. Winged car(s) for Chorus: Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 135, 278-81
4. Winged, 4-legged bird that Oceanus rides: Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 286, 395
5. Chariot/carriage for Agamemnon and Cassandra: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 906, 1039, 1054
6. Etnean colt, which Ismene rides: Soph., *Oedipus at Colonus* 311-321 (probably *not* on stage)
7. Medea's dragon chariot: Eur., *Medea* 1321-1322 ff.
8. Wagon/chariot for Clytemnestra: Eur. *Electra* 966, 998
9. Wagon carrying Andromache, Astyanax, and booty: Eur., *Trojan Women* 568-569
10. Chariot for Clytemnestra and Iphigenia: Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 600

Sub-Total: 10

Allow a person to sit or lie down:

1. Thrones/chairs for Furies: Aesch., *Eumenides* 46-47
2. Statue of Colonus and nearby rock: Soph., *Oedipus at Colonus* 19, 59, et al.
3. Phaedra's sickbed or mat: Eur., *Hippolytus* 179-180
4. Hecuba may be lying on a mat: Eur., *Trojan Women* 507-508
5. Bed/mat for Orestes: Eur., *Orestes* 35 et al.

Sub-Total: 5

Other:

1. Bonds for Prometheus (together called a "psalia," harness, in line 54): Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 6, 19, et al. (for chest: 71, wedge through chest: 64-65, for legs: 74)
2. Hammer for Hephaestus to nail bond to rock: Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 56
3. Nails to fix the bonds to the rock: Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 76
4. Fishing-net ("amphiblêstron") around Prometheus' legs: Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 81
5. Votes and voting urns allow the vote to take place: Aesch., *Eumenides* 742-743
6. Whatever is used to cut locks of hair: Soph., *Ajax* 1171-1172
7. Bonds that restrain Andromache: Eur., *Andromache* 425
8. Electra says that men (Orestes et al.) are hiding near the altar (They are using it to hide, which makes it prop-like.): Eur. *Electra* 216

9. Ropes that restrain Heracles, binding him to pillars: Eur., *Heracles* 1035-1038
10. Bonds that restrain Orestes and Pylades: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 456-457
11. Broom of laurel boughs, which Ion uses to sweep: Eur., *Ion* 79-80, 103-104, 112-113
12. Whatever Pentheus uses to cut Dionysus' hair: Eur., *Bacchae* 493-494
13. Ladder or steps that allow Antigone to climb to the top story of the house (but likely is not onstage; could be behind set): Eur., *Phoenician Women* 100

Sub-Total: 13

Total for Basic, Practical Functions: 34

Identify a Character/Role:

1. White hair for Chorus, identifying them as elders: Aesch., *Persians* 1056
2. Armor, weapons identify the soldiers: Aesch., *Seven against Thebes* 31
3. Persians wearing elaborate Eastern dress (implicit): Aesch., *Seven against Thebes*
4. Olive branches for Chorus, identifying them as suppliants: Aesch., *Suppliant Women* 21-22, 191-192, 480 ff.
5. Chorus may be wearing Sidonian veils, identifying them as foreigners (They say they are tearing them, but it could just be an expression.); also wearing luxurious, non-Greek robes and headbands: Aesch., *Suppliant Women* 120-121, 234-237, 903-904
6. Hephaestus' hammer: Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 56
7. Cow's horns for Io: Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 588
8. Staffs for the Chorus of Elders: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 75
9. Olive wreath on herald's head: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 493-494
10. Cassandra's staff and prophetic bands: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 1266-1267
11. Luggage for Orestes (if on stage) contributes to his disguise as a traveler: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 675-676
12. Olive branch and sword help identify Orestes and his position as suppliant: Aesch., *Eumenides* 43-45
13. Apollo's bow: Aesch., *Eumenides* 181 ff.
14. Athena's aegis: Aesch., *Eumenides* 404
15. Athena calls for the Eumenides to be dressed in red robes, further marking their transformation: Aesch., *Eumenides* 1028
16. Boughs/wreaths that identify the people as suppliants before their king: Soph., *Oedipus Tyrannus* 2-3, 142-143
17. Crown of bay leaves that show that Creon has returned successfully from the Oracle of Delphi: Soph., *Oedipus Tyrannus* 82-83
18. Philoctetes' bow, of Heracles: Soph., *Philoctetes* 654 ff., 762 ff., et al.
19. Apollo's bow and arrows: Eur., *Alcestis* 34-35, 39
20. Death's sword: Eur., *Alcestis* 74-76
21. Garlands, etc. that indicate that Heracles is a guest and reveling in Admetus' home: Eur., *Alcestis* 759-760, 831-832
22. Wreaths that identify the children of Heracles as suppliants: Eur., *Children of Heracles* 71
23. Herald wears Greek clothing: Eur., *Children of Heracles* 130-131

24. Garland that identifies Theseus as an ambassador: Eur., *Hippolytus* 806-807
25. Arrows for Artemis (may or may not appear onstage): Eur., *Hippolytus* 1420-1422
26. Peleus' scepter: Eur., *Andromache* 588
27. Polydorus' clothes are Trojan: Eur., *Hecuba* 734-735 (not a prop, but the clothes show that he is Trojan and identify him as Polydorus the lost son)
28. Suppliant branches identify Chorus as suppliants: Eur., *Suppliant Women* 10
29. Funeral clothing for Megara, Amphitryon, and children, showing that they expect to die: Eur. *Heracles* 442-443
30. Club, bow, and arrows for Heracles: Eur., *Heracles* 568 ff.
31. Garlands, sacred clothing mark Cassandra as a seer: Eur., *Trojan Women* 451-452
32. Menelaus' rags identify him as a shipwreck (though they also impede his identification as Menelaus, at least for the characters): Eur., *Helen* 420-422, 544-545, 554, 1079-1080, 1204
33. Menelaus bathes, gets new clothes that restore him to the role of king: Eur., *Helen* 1296-1297, 1382-1384
34. Lot tablets, golden crown help identify Teiresias: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 838, 856
35. Phrygian slave's Asian boots, etc. identify his role: Eur., *Orestes* 1366 ff.
36. Drums, any other bacchic items the Chorus may carry identify them as worshippers of Dionysus: Eur., *Bacchae* 124 et al.
37. Cadmus' bacchant clothing, thyrsus mark him as a worshipper of Dionysus: Eur., *Bacchae* 180, 188, 363, et al.
38. Teiresias' bacchant clothing, ivy crown (and possibly thyrsus) mark him as a worshipper of Dionysus: Eur., *Bacchae* 205, 248-253
39. Dionysus' long hair, which Pentheus later cuts: Eur., *Bacchae* 455, 493-494
40. Pentheus' female bacchant costume, headdress, and thyrsus belong to the role of a bacchant: Eur., *Bacchae* 914-915, 928-929, 941-942
41. Menelaus' scepter: Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 311

Total: 41

Show a Character's Good or Bad Fortune, Wealth or Poverty:

1. Queen returns without a carriage, so she must have had one for first entrance: Aesch., *Persians* 607 (giving information about earlier)
2. Xerxes' rags: Aesch., *Persians* 834-837, 1017
3. Purple, ornate fabric shows the wealth and glory of Agamemnon's house, could suggest the turn ahead: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 909 ff.
4. Chorus and Electra wear black garments for mourning: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 10-12
5. Whatever is revealed when Tecmessa opens the door to Ajax's hut: Soph., *Ajax* 346 ff.
6. Electra's bad clothing: Soph., *Electra* 190-91
7. Items outside Philoctetes' cave: Soph., *Philoctetes* 33-39
8. Oedipus' bad clothing: Soph., *Oedipus at Colonus* 1256-61
9. Hermione's gold, elaborate clothes, later in disarray: Eur., *Andromache* 147-148, 830-832

10. Evadne wears fine, elaborate clothes, showing that she is not in normal mourning: Eur. *Suppliant Women* 1054-1055
11. Water jug that Electra carries, showing her low state: Eur. *Electra* 55-56, 107-110
12. Electra's miserable clothing, short hair: Eur. *Electra* 107-110, 184-85, 241, 304 ff.
13. Clytemnestra's finery: Eur. *Electra* 966
14. Old man's staff, showing his age: Eur., *Ion* 743-744
15. Menelaus' rags: Eur., *Helen* 420-422, 544-545, 554, 1079-1080, 1204
16. Helen's clothing change, from white to black; she also cuts her hair, bloodies her cheeks (deceptive show of fortune change): Eur., *Helen* 1087-1089, 1186 ff.
17. Menelaus bathes, gets new clothes, showing his change of fortune: Eur., *Helen* 1296-1297, 1382-1384
18. Jocasta has cut her hair and put on dark, ragged clothes to show her misfortune and pain for Polyneices' exile: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 322-326
19. Golden crown for Teiresias attests to his recent success in Athens: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 856
20. Antigone casts away her veil/mantle and lets her saffron robe fly open in her distress: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 1490-1491
21. Orestes is filthy, rough-looking: Eur., *Orestes* 219-220, 225-226, 387
22. Menelaus is splendidly dressed, contrasting his fortune with that of his relatives: Eur., *Orestes* 348-351
23. Tyndareus is in black, with cut hair for mourning: Eur., *Orestes* 467-468
24. Bridal gifts, indicating the expected wedding and the wealth of the family: Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 610-612

Total: 24

Identify a Scene or Indicate Myth/Background:

1. Tomb of Darius: Aesch., *Persians* 659 et al.
2. Rocky cliffs/crags in the wilderness: Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 1-6
3. Items outside Philoctetes' cave: Soph., *Philoctetes* 33-39
4. Temple of Artemis, altar, and trophies of victims hanging: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 74-76

Total: 4

Create a Recognition Scene:

1. Lock of hair and footprints left by Orestes: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 7, 168, 206, et al.
2. Orestes' piece of weaving or garment, made by Electra: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 231
3. Seal that belonged to Agamemnon: Soph., *Electra* 1222-1223
4. Tablet/letter that Iphigenia writes: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 727 ff.
5. Cradle plus weaving and other items inside: Eur., *Ion* 1337-1338 ff.
6. (Arguable) Pentheus' head on Agave's thyrsus brings about her recognition of her son and her actions: Eur., *Bacchae* 1173-1175, 1280 ff.

Total: 6

Kill a Character/Create a Death Scene: (*also, in a sense, a practical function*)

1. Chorus threatens to use their girdles and belts to kill themselves: Aesch., *Suppliant Women* 457
2. Orestes may carry a sword, especially after he is revealed over Aegisthus' body; the sword would kill Aegisthus, then Clytemnestra off stage: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 891 ff., et al.
3. Ajax's sword, of Hector: Soph., *Ajax* 658, 815 ff. (potentially an onstage death)
4. Poisoned tunic, given from Deinara to Heracles: Soph., *Women of Trachis* 580, 612, et al. (begins off stage, continues on stage)
5. Poisoned gown and diadem: Eur., *Medea* 950-951, 956 (offstage death)
6. Medea *might* have a sword: Eur., *Medea* 1244 (offstage deaths)
7. Sword for Orestes: Eur. *Electra* 225; offstage murder described in 1221-1223
8. Club, bow, and arrows that Heracles uses to kill Megara and his children off stage: Eur., *Heracles* 568 ff., 1098-1100, 1377 et al.
9. Golden vessel with Gorgon's blood: Eur., *Ion* 1030 (unsuccessful offstage murder attempt)
10. Swords for Orestes and Pylades nearly create a death scene off stage for Helen and again on stage as they hold Hermione hostage: Eur., *Orestes* 1223, 1567 ff.

Total: 10

Accomplish a Trick/Deceit:

1. Luggage for Orestes (if on stage) contributes to his disguise: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 675-76
2. Bronze urn, supposedly with Orestes' ashes: Soph., *Electra* 1113-1114 ff.
3. Poisoned tunic, given from Deinara to Heracles: Soph., *Women of Trachis* 580, 612, et al. (accidental, on Deinara's part)
4. Poisoned gown and diadem: Eur., *Medea* 950-951, 956
5. Tablet in dead Phaedra's hand, accusing Hippolytus: Eur., *Hippolytus* 856-857
6. Small statue of Artemis, which Iphigenia carries; also lambs, torches, etc.: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 1157-1158
7. Helen's clothing change, from white to black (also cuts hair, bloodies cheeks): Eur., *Helen* 1087-1089, 1186 ff.

Total: 7

Ritual Function:

Perform an offering:

1. Queen's libations/offerings: Aesch., *Persians* 523-524, 607 ff.
2. Locks of hair offered by Orestes on Agamemnon's tomb: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 7, 168, et al.
3. Libations offered by Electra to Agamemnon: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 24, 87 ff.
4. Libations, other offerings that Orestes brings, then uses off stage to perform the offering: Soph., *Electra* 52, 892 ff.
5. Offerings Chrysothemis brings on behalf of Clytemnestra but then pours out: Soph., *Electra* 326-327, 405 ff.

6. Electra's girdle and locks of hair from both sisters, which Chrysothemis takes to offer on Agamemnon's tomb: Soph., *Electra* 448-452
7. Fruits, offerings from Clytemnestra to Apollo: Soph., *Electra* 634 ff.
8. Garlands and incense that Iocasta offers to Apollo: Soph., *Oedipus Tyrannus* 911-913
9. Garland that Hippolytus brings for Artemis: Eur., *Hippolytus* 73
10. Bowl, gold vessel holding libations: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 159 ff.
11. Helen's hair offering and libations, which she gives to Hermione (offering made off stage): Eur., *Orestes* 113

Sub-Total: 11

Grant sanctuary to suppliant(s):

1. Rock/altar, possibly with trident or other markings: Aesch., *Suppliant Women* 189, 218, et al.
2. Navel/center-stone of Oracle of Delphi: Aesch., *Eumenides* 40
3. Statue of Colonus: Soph., *Oedipus at Colonus* 59, et al.
4. Altars: Eur., *Children of Heracles* 33
5. Shrine of Thetis, where Andromache is a suppliant: Eur., *Andromache* 43
6. Altar to Zeus the Savior, where children of Heracles take refuge: Eur. *Heracles* 48
7. Altar (and statue?): Eur., *Ion* 1280, 1404
8. Tomb of Proteus: Eur., *Helen* 63-65, 798

Sub-Total: 8

Perform funerary rites over a corpse:

1. Locks of hair, something to cut them: Soph., *Ajax* 1171-1172
2. Finery for the dead Alcestis: Eur., *Alcestis* 611-613, 618
3. Ashes/bones of the dead, probably in urns (the ashes allow the women to weep over the dead as for a funeral): Eur., *Suppliant Women* 1114 ff.
4. Adornments for the dead Astyanax: Eur., *Trojan Women* 1207-1208
5. Hair that Antigone tears out and casts on the bodies of her mother and brothers: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 1524-1526 ff.

Sub-Total: 5

Other:

1. Chorus clasps statues of gods on altar in supplication, possibly garlands them: Aesch., *Seven against Thebes* 98 ff.
2. Torches for procession for Eumenides to go below the earth (possible): Aesch., *Eumenides* 1022
3. Vessels that Ion says he will fill with water as part of his duties at the Oracle (he may or may not do it on stage): Eur., *Ion* 434-436
4. Torches for Theonoe's servants to use to purify the air: Eur., *Helen* 865 ff.
5. Drums, any other bacchic items the Chorus may carry allow them to worship Dionysus: Eur., *Bacchae* 124 et al.
6. Locks of Dionysus' hair, which Pentheus cuts (blasphemy): Eur., *Bacchae* 493-494

Sub-Total: 6

Total for Ritual Function: 30

Symbolic Function²³³:

1. Purple, ornate fabric: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 909 ff.
2. Robe or net that caught Agamemnon: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 980-983
3. Votes and voting urns: Aesch., *Eumenides* 742-743
4. Ajax's sword, of Hector: Soph., *Ajax* 658, 815 ff.
5. Philoctetes' bow, of Heracles: Soph., *Philoctetes* 654 ff., 762 ff., et al.
6. Statue of Colonus, Soph., *Oedipus at Colonus* 59, et al.
7. Medea's dragon chariot: Eur., *Medea* 1321-22 ff.

Total: 7

Show Aggression:

1. Armor, weapons for soldiers show imminence of battle: Aesch., *Seven against Thebes* 31
2. Greaves, other armor for Eteocles in preparation for battle (props, if they appear, because he puts them on while on stage): Aesch., *Seven against Thebes* 675 ff.
3. Swords for guards: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 1651
4. Orestes may carry a sword, especially after he is revealed over Aegisthus' body: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 891 ff. et al.
5. Apollo's bow (shows his protection of Orestes): Aesch., *Eumenides* 181 ff.
6. (*Implicit*) Orestes may carry a sword, particularly for the end of the play: Soph., *Electra*
7. Philoctetes' bow; arrow at 1299: Soph., *Philoctetes* 654 ff., 762 ff., 1299, et al.
8. Odysseus' sword: Soph., *Philoctetes* 1255
9. Apollo's bow and arrows: Eur., *Alcestis* 34-35, 39
10. Death's sword: Eur., *Alcestis* 74-76
11. Bonds for Andromache's hands: Eur., *Andromache* 425
12. Sword for Orestes, which Electra interprets as a threat: Eur. *Electra* 225
13. Heracles' weapons: Eur. *Heracles* 568 ff., et al.
14. Achilles' men come with armor and, presumably, weapons: Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 1359
15. Swords for mob of Delphians: Eur., *Ion* 1257-1258
16. Sword for Menelaus (he may or may not have one; if not, this is just bluster): Eur., *Helen* 1044, 1086
17. Armor, shield, spear, panoply for Menelaus shortly before the offstage escape and massacre: Eur., *Helen* 1375-1381
18. Sword for Theoclymenus (It is unclear whether he has one as he makes his threats.): Eur., *Helen* 1632, 1656
19. Golden armor; sword for Polynices: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 168-169, 267

²³³ Many, perhaps even most, props have some symbolic function. This list includes only those that I consider to have the strongest and most significant symbolic resonances.

20. Weapons, armor for Eteocles indicate he is about to go to battle (he calls for it, then exits, so it may not come on stage): Eur., *Phoenician Women* 779 ff.
21. Orestes may have a real or mimed bow to “fight” the Furies: Eur., *Orestes* 268 ff.
22. Swords for Orestes and Pylades: Eur., *Orestes* 1223, 1504, 1575
23. Torches for Orestes, Pylades, and Electra, with which they threaten to burn down the house: Eur., *Orestes* 1573
24. Pentheus cuts Dionysus’ hair: Eur., *Bacchae* 493-494
25. Achilles’ sword (shows his new role as protector of Iphigenia and his own honor): Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 970

Total: 25

Indicate or Embody Power:

1. Philoctetes’ bow, of Heracles: Soph., *Philoctetes* 654 ff., 762 ff., et al.
2. Peleus’ scepter: Eur., *Andromache* 588
3. Club, bow, and arrows for Heracles show the return of a powerful protector: Eur., *Heracles* 570 et al.
4. Menelaus’ scepter: Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 311

Total: 4

Create a Contact Point:

1. Bonds, nails, etc. for Hephaestus to bind Prometheus to the rock face: Aesch. (?), *Prometheus Bound* 57 ff.
2. *Indirect*: Lock of hair and footprints from Orestes bring contact between him and Electra: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 7, 168, 206 et al.
3. *Both direct and indirect*: Bronze urn, supposedly with Orestes’ ashes: Soph., *Electra* 1113-1114 ff.
4. *Indirect*: Poisoned tunic, given from Deinara to Heracles: Soph., *Women of Trachis* 580, 612, et al.
5. Philoctetes’ bow, of Heracles: Soph., *Philoctetes* 762 ff. (Philoctetes hands it to Neoptolemus, who later returns it.)
6. Veil/cover for Phaedra, which the Nurse removes and replaces: Eur., *Hippolytus* 201-202, 243-245, 250
7. Cloth/garment that Theseus uses to cover Hippolytus’ face: Eur., *Hippolytus* 1457-1458
8. Electra puts a garland in Orestes’ hair and gives another to Pylades: Eur. *Electra* 882
9. Tablet/letter that Iphigenia gives to Pylades, who passes it to Orestes: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 727 ff. (It passes from Pylades to Orestes at 791; it is unclear when it passes to Pylades.)
10. Cradle plus weaving and other items inside: Eur., *Ion* 1337-1338 ff.
11. Golden vial with Gorgon’s blood, which Creusa gives to the old man as they confirm their partnership and plan: Eur. *Ion* 1029ff.
12. Ivy crown that Cadmus tries to put on Pentheus (refused point of contact): Eur., *Bacchae* 341-344

13. Pentheus cuts locks of Dionysus' hair and takes his thyrsus: Eur., *Bacchae* 493-495
14. Curl of hair and headdress, which Dionysus adjusts for Pentheus: Eur., *Bacchae* 928-934
15. The baby Orestes (probably a prop): Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 1452²³⁴

Total: 15

Cover or Uncover Someone²³⁵:

1. Chorus may be tearing their Sidonian veils (They say so, but it could just be an expression.): Aesch., *Suppliant Women* 120-121
2. Cassandra's prophetic bands/insignia, which she casts off: Aesch., *Agamemnon* 1264 ff.
3. Clytemnestra baring her breast: Aesch., *Libation Bearers* 896-898
4. Cloth/cloak to cover Ajax's body: Soph., *Ajax* 915-916, 1003
5. Veil for Alcestis when she returns with Heracles (possible, implicit; veil may be drawn back, potentially creating contact.): Eur., *Alcestis* 1008-1121
6. Iolaus asks the boys to set him down on the altar and cover him with his garments: Eur., *Children of Heracles* 603-604
7. Veil or cover for Phaedra's head: Eur., *Hippolytus* 201-202, 243-245, 250
8. Something to cover face of dying Hippolytus: Eur., *Hippolytus* 1457-1458
9. Polyxena asks Odysseus to wrap a garment about her head and take her away (This may also involve contact, if Odysseus does wrap her head.): Eur., *Hecuba* 432-434
10. Hecuba lies wrapped in her garments: Eur., *Hecuba* 486-487
11. Adrastus' head is wrapped in his garments, and Theseus tells him to uncover it: Eur. *Suppliant Women* 110-112
12. Theseus says that Aethra holds her clothing before her eyes, weeping: Eur. *Suppliant Women* 286-288
13. (*Off stage*) Orestes says he covered his eyes with his clothes when killing Clytemnestra: Eur. *Electra* 1221-1223
14. Amphitryon covers his eyes as Heracles wakes: Eur., *Heracles* 1111
15. Heracles wants to cover his head with his clothes so that Theseus won't look at him and be polluted: Eur., *Heracles* 1159, 1200-1204 ff.
16. Orestes' and Pylades' heads are covered: Eur., *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 1207, 1222
17. Thoas covers his head to avoid pollution from seeing the polluted foreigners: Eur. *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, 1217-1218
18. Old man covers his head in grief for Creusa and her father: Eur., *Ion* 967

²³⁴ The precise movements of the baby Orestes are very unclear, and much of the relevant text is uncertain. I suggest 1452 as an approximate point at which Iphigenia would give the baby to Clytemnestra or an attendant. (She had brought the baby onstage and asked him to help supplicate their father.)

²³⁵ Some examples of this category fit neatly as a subcategory of "Create a Contact Point." This is a category in its own right, however, because many characters cover themselves, without involving contact with another character.

19. Veil/mantle for Antigone, which she casts away: Eur., *Phoenician Women* 1490-1491
20. Veil/garment to cover Electra's head (Orestes tells her to uncover her head after his fit): Eur., *Orestes* 294
21. Iphigenia covers her face with her clothes: Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 1122-1123
22. (*Off stage*) Messenger reports that Agamemnon held his garment before his face for the sacrifice: Eur., *Iphigenia at Aulis* 1549-1550

Total: 22

Part III: Common Associations for Props

Masculine vs. Feminine
Earthly vs. Supernatural
Wealth/Good Fortune vs. Poverty/Bad Fortune
Greek vs. Barbarian
Civilization vs. Wildness
Light vs. Dark
City vs. Country/Farm
War
The Home
Temple/Oracle
Mourning/Death
Marriage/Wedding
Medical: illness, injury, nursing, etc.
A particular family heritage
A particular mythological background

APPENDIX III

EPIPHANIES IN GREEK TRAGEDY

The following is a categorization of plays based on their use of gods on the stage. Most entries include a brief explanation and analysis of the god's appearance and, when applicable, interactions with characters.

Plays with No Gods Appearing on Stage:

Aeschylus, *Persians*: None, but the ghost of Darius does appear.

Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes*: None

Aeschylus, *Suppliants*: None

Sophocles, *Electra*: None

Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*: None

Sophocles, *Antigone*: None

Sophocles, *Women of Trachis*: None

Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*: None

Euripides, *Medea*: None, but Medea at the end fills this role to some degree.

Euripides, *Children of Heracles*: None

Euripides, *Hecuba*: None, but there is a ghost (Polydorus), and Polymestor post-blinding fills that role to some degree, through his prophecies.

Euripides, *Phoenician Women*: None

Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*: None

Total: 13

Plays with Gods as Prologues but No Interaction between Gods and Characters:

Euripides, *Alcestis*: Apollo gives the prologue, along with Death. There are no gods at the end, but Heracles with Alcestis is somewhat similar in its resolution of the plot.

Euripides, *Trojan Women*: The play begins with a discussion between Poseidon and Athena. In his opening speech, Poseidon indicates Hecuba lying here in front of the door, but the gods never interact with her, and she does not know they are there.

Total: 2

Plays with Gods Whom Characters Can See:

Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*: Prometheus is the protagonist. Hephaestus and Cratos appear at the beginning to bind him; Hermes comes later to try to convince him to give Zeus information.

Aeschylus, *Oresteia*: Athena, Apollo, and the Erinyes are important characters in *Eumenides*.

Sophocles, *Philoctetes*: Heracles appears at the end. He speaks before the characters notice him, but he tells them, “Know that you hear the voice of Heracles with your ears and see his face” [φάσκειν δ’ αὐδὴν τὴν Ἡρακλέους / ἀκοῇ τε κλύειν λεύσσειν τ’ ὄψιν] (1411-1412). The language is specific to hearing and seeing.

Euripides, *Andromache*: Peleus is lamenting the death of his son, Neoptolemus, and his speech ends with: “And you, o Nereid (nymph daughter of Nereus) in your dark cave, you will see me having fallen, completely destroyed” (1224-1225). The Chorus then seems to see Thetis approaching: “Oh, oh! What is this moving, which of the gods do I perceive? Women, look [λεύσσετ’], gaze at/watch [ἀθρήσατε]! Here some god is passing through the clear aether and comes down on the plain of horse-pasturing Phthia” (1226-1230). This language is more specifically visual than in many other examples of epiphany. Thetis appears and tells Peleus not to be too upset by his misfortunes. She tells him to listen as she tells him why she has come, and then she gives her instructions. Peleus joyfully agrees to do as she says.

Euripides, *Electra*: Castor and Polydeuces appear at the end. The Chorus sees them coming: “But look, above the tops of the houses come some daemons/spirits or gods of the heavens. For that is not a path for mortals. Why ever do they come in an appearance to mortal sight/eyes?” (1233-1237). Castor begins: “Son of Agamemnon, listen! The twin brothers of your mother, the Dioscuri, call you, Castor and my brother Polydeuces here” (1238-1240). Castor gives instructions to Orestes, Electra, and Pylades. Orestes asks, “O sons of Zeus, is it right for us to draw near into your voice/conversation?”²³⁶ Castor replies, “It is right, for you are not with polluting murders.” Electra then asks, “And [is it also right] for me to be with speech, sons of Tyndareus?” Castor: “And for you; for I will assign this bloody/murderous deed to Pheobus” (1293-1297). This exchange could have interesting implications for understanding murder pollution and the play’s attitude toward the murder of Clytemnestra.

Euripides, *Heracles*: Lyssa and Iris appear in the middle of the play. The Chorus panics upon seeing them approach: “Oh, oh!/Look! Look! Have we old men come into the same shower of fear, such an apparition/phantom to I see above the house? Flee, flee! Lift up your sluggish limbs, drive far away from here! Lord Paean, become a protector (literally: bring about a turning away) for me of pains/calamities!” (815-821). Iris then says: “Take heart, old men, looking upon this daughter of Night, Lyssa, and me, the handmaid of the gods, Iris. For we have not come with harm for the city, but we advance against the house of one man, whom they say is of Zeus and Alcmene...” (822-826). After Lyssa tries to talk Iris out of the plan, she says, “I call Helios as a witness for myself, that I, doing this, do not want to do it” (858). She then describes what she will do and is doing. Note especially “ἰδοῦ” for its command to

²³⁶ Diggle’s 1981 edition gives this line to the Chorus and rearranges some of the lines in this section.

look at what is happening (867). She ends by telling Iris to go back to Olympus and saying that she herself will go down into Heracles' house, invisible (874).

Euripides, *Ion*: Before Athena speaks, Ion says: "Hey!/Look! Which of the gods shows forth a shining face from over the incense-filled temple? Let us flee, mother, and let us not look at the gods, unless it is the right time for us to see" (1549-1552).²³⁷ Athena tells them not to run away, then gives her story and instructions. (Hermes also appears to give the prologue, but no one else is on stage then.)

Euripides, *Bacchae*: The staging of Dionysus in this play is too complicated for analysis here, but there is a god on stage through most of the play. Characters certainly see Dionysus, but they may not see his full divinity, at least not until the end of the play.

Euripides, *Rhesus*: One of the Muses appears at the end, carrying the body of Rhesus. The Chorus announces her approach, asking who appears above their heads carrying a newly killed corpse (885-889). This is the second epiphany in the play; the first features an unseen god (Athena).

Total: 9

Plays with Gods Who Are, or May Be, Only Heard²³⁸:

Sophocles, *Ajax*: Athena appears at the beginning of the play. Odysseus cannot see her; Ajax probably cannot, either. Both can hear her voice. (See Chapter 4 for further analysis of this scene.)

Euripides, *Hippolytus*: Aphrodite gives a prologue alone on stage. In lines 84-87, as he sings praises to Artemis, Hippolytus says that he alone of mortals spends time together with her and converses with her, though he can only hear her voice and not see her face. Artemis appears at the end, as Hippolytus is dying. Theseus has just said that Cypris holds sway over everything, and Artemis appears, saying: "I command/urge you, noble son of Aegeus, listen! I, daughter of Leto, Artemis, call you" (1282-1285). A bit later in the same speech, she tells him to "hear" [ἄκουε] the state of his misfortunes (1296). When Hippolytus comes on stage, he makes no mention of Artemis, even though she is already there, until she speaks to him. His response is: "Hey!/Look! O divine breath of fragrance! Although I am in misfortune, I have perceived you and felt my body lighten. The goddess Artemis is in this place!" (1391-1393). He then asks her, "Do you see [ὁρᾷς] me, mistress/lady, as I am, wretched?" (1395). She says, "I see you [ὁρῶ], but it is not right for me to cast tears from my two eyes" (1396). Everyone laments, but then Artemis says she must leave: "And farewell; for it is not right for me to see the dead, nor to defile my eye/sight with dying breaths; and I see that you now are close to this misfortune" (1437-1439). She then exits.

²³⁷ All quotations are my translations from the Loeb editions of the Greek.

²³⁸ This list includes ambiguous examples.

Euripides, *Suppliant Women*: Athena appears at the end of the play: everything seems to be settled, with Theseus and Adrastus about to part, when Athena enters (with no notice from any characters before she speaks). She tells Theseus to listen [“ἄκουε,” 1183] to the words of Athena and to exact an oath from Adrastus that the Argives will never attack this city and that they will protect it against any others who might attack. She continues to give instructions and predictions. Theseus says he will obey.

Euripides, *Iphigenia among the Taurians*: Athena appears at the end, just as Thoas is preparing to pursue Iphigenia, Orestes, and Pylades. She interrupts him, without anyone commenting about seeing or hearing her first: “Where, where, King Thoas, do you advance your chase? Listen to the words of Athena. Stop your pursuit...” (1435-1436). Later in the speech, she addresses Iphigenia using the second person, which indicates that Iphigenia can hear her, even though she is actually at sea and far away: “And it is necessary for you, Iphigenia, to be a priestess for this goddess in the holy meadows of Brauron” (1462-1463). After all the instructions, Thoas says, “Lady Athena, whoever upon hearing the words of the god is [then] disobedient, does not think straight” (1475-1476). Here, the focus falls heavily on the words, not the appearance, of Athena and on the need to hear and obey them.

Euripides, *Helen*: Castor and Pollux appear at the end, stopping Theoclymenus from trying to kill his sister and the servant. They speak before he notices them, telling him to stop. After their instructions, Theoclymenus says he will give up his claim on Helen and not punish his sister.

Euripides, *Orestes*: Apollo appears at the end of the play, just as Orestes, Pylades, and Electra are about to set the house on fire, with Menelaus calling for reinforcements. Apollo speaks before anyone notices him, telling Menelaus to calm down. He then identifies himself: “I, Apollo son of Leto, call you from nearby” (1626). This might imply that they cannot see him. Orestes responds: “O prophetic Loxias, you are not false in your prophesying but truthful. Indeed fear came upon me, hearing one of the avenging spirits but thinking that I heard your voice” (1666-1669). Also significant for this play is Orestes’ madness in the beginning, as the Furies torment him. The Furies are probably not visible on the stage.

Euripides, *Rhesus*: Athena appears in the middle of the play, lines 595-674. She speaks to Odysseus and Diomedes, telling them not to retreat but to kill Rhesus and steal his horses. In response to her first speech, Odysseus replies: “Mistress Athena, indeed I perceive the familiar sound of your voice” [δέσποιν’ Ἀθάνᾳ, φθέγματος γὰρ ἡσθόμην / τοῦ σοῦ συνήθη γῆρυν] (608-609). Later, Alexandros approaches, and Athena says that although she has spoken instructions to Odysseus and Diomedes, Alexandros has not been able to hear them (640-641). She then speaks to Alexandros, pretending to be Aphrodite, and deceives him. It seems that none of the mortals can see Athena.

Total: 7

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